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The WARS of PEACE

A. F. WILSON

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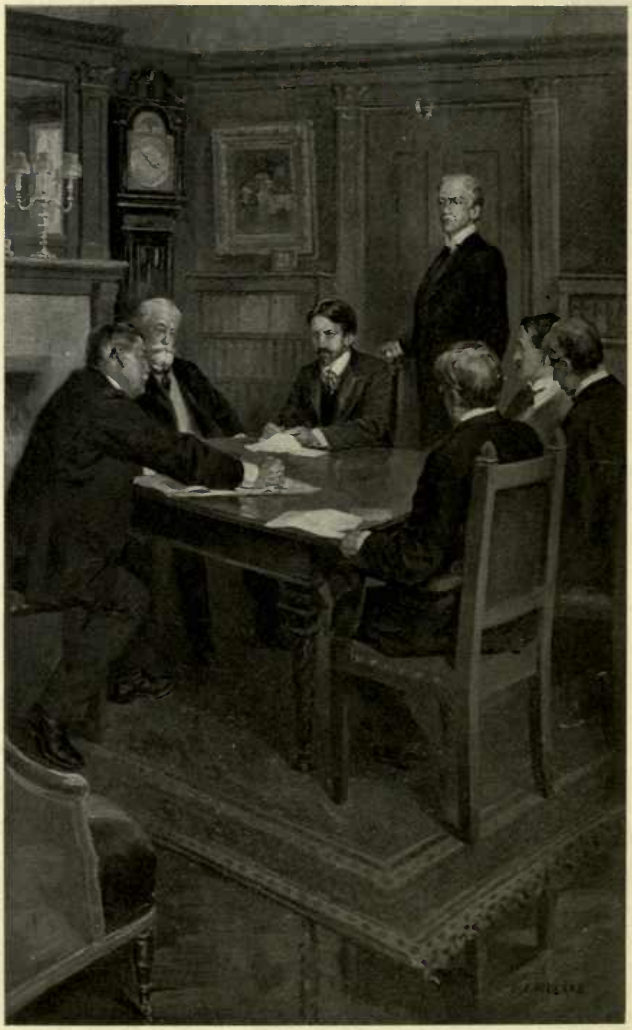

THE WARS OF PEACE

BY

A. F. WILSON

Illustrated by H. C. Ireland

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THE WARS OF PEACE

CHAPTER I

"It was first-class, old man, and I wanted to tell you so!" Marcus Oakley said with his peculiarly winning smile, stretching out his hand as he spoke. "I thought I'd find you up here."

"I'm glad you liked it," Reid answered carelessly. "I'm heartily thankful it's over."

His eyes wandered idly from his friend's face to the low, red walls decorated with play-bills and trophies; the dark beams, glistening in the lamplight; the leather couches, piled with cushions. The warmth of the fire was pleasant in the cool of the May evening, his cigar was fragrant, and he was in the mood for quiet, confidential talk. Into such a frame of mind Oakley always fitted with a facile habit of harmony with his surroundings.

"I wonder sometimes if the honor — whatever you get out of a thing of that sort — pays for the bother?" Oakley said thoughtfully.

"There's precious little honor, when you come to that," Reid answered. "The newspapers have proved again and again that it is the football player who rises to the Senate and the valedictorian who stays behind the counter all his days."

"Well, your Founder's Day oration can't be laid up against you. 'Twas plain common sense. You and I don't agree about that, anyway. I don't expect to have my college record trouble me."

"That's just what I have been saying — the Thanksgiving game will take the curse off the *Summa Cum*. But there's no hope for me."

"And you pull a splendid stroke, too," Oakley answered regretfully.

"Being sworn at up and down the river every afternoon doesn't appeal to me, somehow. When you have to do a thing it gets to be work and not play."

"Well, every man to his taste. I can sympathize with most after a fashion — but some I can't understand," he added after a little pause, as his eyes wandered to a near-by group.

"They've been hitting quite a pace this year, haven't they? It's a pity," Reid answered, taking in the significance of the look. A pause followed, invaded by the clatter of mugs and bois-

terous laughter. Reid watched the group a little scornfully. He was unfitted by nature to understand the faults of manner and conduct into which Theodore Harding and his friends had fallen. Such offences were primarily those of good taste to Reid and verged on the incomprehensible. An essential fastidiousness stood him in as good stead as principle, and an offence in manners irritated him more than a breach of morals. As Harding's high-pitched laughter rang out above the rest, Reid knit his brows and his lip curved coldly.

"How did they get in here, anyway? They're not like the general run of Stamp and Seal men," Reid went on.

"I don't know, I'm sure. It isn't my place to say anything. I owe being here to Teddy Harding, as I happened to find out."

"I didn't know you were a friend of his."

"I'm not, but we both come from Underhill, and went to the same fitting school," Oakley hastened to explain.

"In a way he's the most objectionable of those fellows; but I don't think he's the worst," Reid continued with a subtle pleasure in his character analysis.

"No, but he always seems to be saying, 'Look at me! What a little devil I am anyway.' He

parades his badness and if he gets taken at his word he needn't complain," Oakley acquiesced easily.

"I suppose you know his people?" Reid inquired. "What are they like?"

"His father is a big manufacturer. He owns three mills in Underhill and an interest in nobody knows how many more all over the country. They have lots of money."

"Are there any other children?" Reid asked.

"A daughter, a mighty nice little girl. But the father is great stuff; a thorough business man, keen as ever was but straight as a string, religious and all that, and a good deal of a scholar and musician. The mother is exquisite, the porcelain sort. She must have been a beauty once, and is still, for that matter."

"It wouldn't strike me Teddy belonged to a family like that," Reid commented keenly. He was interested in matters of heredity.

"He doesn't, exactly. That may be one reason he has gone a little wrong —. Confound it, is it half-past eight? I'm due to preside at the athletic meeting this minute."

Oakley hurried away and Reid sat watching the group with half-shut, speculative eyes. He was not naturally tolerant and prided himself a little upon his ideals, a little more upon the fact

that he was not ashamed to live up to them. He did not thank the Lord that he was not as other men — he was not in the habit of acknowledging indebtedness to any such source; he only lifted up a little paean to Francis Reid for his deliverance.

Suddenly a rollicking voice struck up a song. Reid knew it well, for he had often heard the same group of Stamp and Seal men roaring its chorus. It irritated him with its half-veiled insinuations. He rose, annoyed that his quiet had been disturbed; but, as he stood indecisive, mocking words interrupted the singer.

"Man! man! you forget you are shocking little Theodora's sensibilities. Theodora doesn't think that's a pretty song,— she's blushing now. Can't you mind your manners when ladies are around?"

Harding rose angrily, colliding with Reid as he did so, and started for the door. He was evidently perturbed, but made no objection when Reid slipped a friendly hand under his arm. The latter heard his companion muttering,

"D — n it all! They're a set of beastly Micks. What was there to laugh at in that, I should like to know? I've half a mind to cut the whole gang."

Dusk had settled. The arc lights faded and

glowed again as they swung in the cool Spring breeze; the boughs of the maples, glad with fresh young leaves, stood out distinctly against the darkening sky. The chill of the street was refreshing, and with a common impulse the two young men turned southward.

Reid was pleased with this sudden confirmation of his character analysis. But he hesitated to speak. He knew the average young man's dislike for the discussion of serious things. He realized that advice would come but awkwardly from him, Harding's senior by no more than two years. Nevertheless he felt himself a man in experience and character beside this wilful, unformed boy. He felt that he must run the risk of seeming to preach, the chance of alienating confidence, rather than ignore this tacit appeal. So after a little thoughtful pause he said carelessly,

"Why don't you shake them? They're not your sort."

"I guess you're wrong there, Reid," his companion answered a trifle wistfully. "They're the sort I've always been with."

"Yes, but you're not satisfied with it; you don't really like it."

"I like it well enough. It's all I'm fit for, anyway."

"Nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense. What's a fellow going to do? I can't make Founder's Day speeches, or edit magazines. I don't know enough. I can't do any thing in athletics. I'm not big enough."

"All that is no reason why you shouldn't be decent and herd with decent folks," said Reid with calculating bluntness. The other's mood of abasement seemed to him unwholesome. "You're a popular fellow. Anybody I know would be glad to see more of you if you didn't always have that set hanging around. People like you. They can't help it, if you do act like a fool." The tone robbed the epithet of any sting.

"They may like me, some of them," Harding answered thoughtfully, "but they don't respect me."

"I'm not so sure about that. The rig you've been running doesn't count for much, if you only stop it in time. It's a thing lots of fellows fall into and come out of again, with no harm done. It's your own feeling for yourself it counts with most."

There was a long silence. The two wheeled as they came to the river side and turned homeward again. At last Reid said,

"A man who is coming in for a share in a big

business, and all the responsibility that goes with it, needs to be all he can make himself."

"I know it. My chance ought to go to a better man. Now you could make use of it. You know how the thing ought to be done."

"Nonsense, I'm only a theorist. You've got the stuff in you all right. Give yourself a fair show. Suppose 'twas some other chap you were responsible for — a younger brother you were guardian of, or something of that sort. You'd try to keep him out of company that wasn't good for him; and then if he did get up against it hard, someway or other, you wouldn't tell him 'twas all he was good for, and there was no show for him. You'd start him fresh and brace him up. Why don't you do the square thing by yourself?"

"By Jove, that's so!" said Harding thoughtfully, and then was silent. Reid hesitated to break the pause. He preferred to say too little than too much; and did not guess how keen a desire for advice and sympathy lay beneath the half-shy, half-defiant manner. He did not realize that Harding, man-of-the-world as he counted himself, was on the verge of petulant, boyish tears.

When they parted Theodore went directly to his room, and flinging himself on his couch, stared about him with gloomy eyes. The bar-

baric jumble of gay cushions and hangings and gaudy posters offended him vaguely. He was at odds with his whole world. Reid's oration of the night before, with its outlining of the relations which should exist between the employer and his workmen, had come with exaggerated force to one unthinking member of his audience, and had hastened the awakening which had been going on all the year. Harding told himself bitterly that he was a failure and had been one too long to hope for anything better. He was sensitive to subtle atmospheres, and knew that his reserved father counted his son as a small factor in all plans for the future. This hopeless sense of his own limitations had acted as a strong impetus toward the wild company which had welcomed him so gladly.

He did not, however, consider extenuating circumstances tonight. He thought shrinkingly of four wasted college years — of boisterous midnight suppers, of hazy returns to his room, of dim, disordered mornings. Some things, he thought humbly, he had not to reproach himself with — things which certain of his comrades treated lightly. There was an inherent purity, amid all his faults, that had stood him in good stead. But in his humility the vices far outnumbered the virtues, and showed black indeed to his

gloomy view. His sense of humor told him that May of his senior year was over-late to begin serious study. Nevertheless, he seated himself doggedly at his desk with firm-set, boyish lips, and with an unworn volume of "Mill" before him.

CHAPTER II

Four years later, on a night in May, Francis Reid left the train at the city of Underhill. The country through which he had travelled was flushed with pink and white and tender green. The air, even in the outskirts of the town, was heavy with the scent of lilac and apple-blossom. But a depression, alien to the brightness of the May landscape, had weighed all day upon his spirit. Representative of the Boston "Observer" though he was, his was only a chance assignment which would probably end with the termination of the big strike. He had only this casual employment to show at the end of four years; he was shabby, and poor and hungry also, he admitted, smiling bitterly. Sharpest of all came the thought that he must meet Theodore Harding in Underhill.

He had not followed Harding's fortunes since graduation; and had hardly thought of him until

the beginning of the strike had brought Underhill and the Hardings to the notice of the whole country. Theodore's opinions were quoted respectfully, his influence among the men commented on, and Reid realized with surprise that his classmate had become a person of importance.

For himself, he realized that no such thing could be said. He had learned stern lessons: that a man, brilliant and well-educated, is not necessarily successful; that theories and ideals are not made of stuff to stand the wear of life; that the loss of things so immaterial, painful though it may be, does not hinder the physical process of living; that the baffled desire for the elemental and necessary leaves little room for other longings. Some casual happening will often put an end to the lethargy of disappointment. So the knowledge that he must, in all probability, meet Theodore Harding, and give an account of four unprofitable years, stung Reid to a fresh sense of failure. His instinct for news revived, however, and he forgot his depression when once he alighted at the station. The little square, flanked by tall office buildings, seemed packed with people. Reid knew that a train-load of non-union workmen was expected that night, and easily guessed the meaning of the assemblage. He saw, too, that the temper of the crowd was growing more

and more unsafe as the listeners crowded about a baggage-dray on the station platform. From this extemporized height a man was addressing the crowd. The rosy light of the after-glow tinged the pallid, dark face with a fictitious color. The deep tones of the voice rang out over the restless people who winced under the cutting words.

There was nothing new in the speech,— the same things were said that night from a hundred places in the land. The trite catch-words, the arraignment of capital, the deification of labor,— all took a new force, however, from the passion of the man's splendid voice. Reid listened impatiently. He wanted to counsel order and patience, and the dignity that would command respect the world over. He made a movement toward the truck where the speaker stood, then he stopped. Of what use for him to speak? He was absolutely unknown, and without influence. He could only listen helplessly to the sinister note that gradually crept into the murmur of voices.

The scene appealed to him keenly,— the crowd growing more picturesque, less distinct, as the twilight deepened, the lithe figure, the quaint angles of the station roof, the lights and shades. All the accessories seemed as if arranged by a clever stage-manager to heighten the dramatic

effect. The curious, electric tension generated by a crowd, filled the air and crept into Reid's own veins. He felt growing in his mind a good story for the "Observer." He lost nothing of what happened, but all the time he was half-consciously putting it into telling phrases. Suddenly there came a movement in the crowd. A man, tall, erect, and with snowy hair, stood upon the platform. He lifted a hand which gleamed white in the dusk. Something in the dignity of the figure, in the air of conscious power, quelled for a moment the growing restlessness about him. The effect was only transitory, however. The cultured voice, with its refined accent, failed to dominate the crowd. The well-chosen words seemed flat and pointless. The speaker faltered and paused as, cold and sibilant, a hiss cut the air.

Time was passing swiftly and the train, laden with non-union men, was steadily drawing nearer. Reid felt that the temper of the mob was growing more and more dangerous. He was wondering if he had any message powerful enough, any words graphic enough, to offset his obscurity, when his arm was softly touched.

"May I speak to you for a moment?" a low voice said in his ear.

Reid turned with a nervous start and recognized the man who had just spoken so fruitlessly.

The striking face was unmistakable. The head was held high, but the voice quivered with suppressed feeling and nervous anxiety. The young man followed his elder out of earshot of the crowd, yielding as if to lawful authority.

"Will you help me stop this business? It is coming to murder if we don't do something. The only thing I can think of is to stop the train at Wilmot — but I can't get at the telegraph office. I've just been trying. They've got guards set over the telephones at the offices. They seem to be regularly organized and bound to prevent us from getting the men in here; but anybody who can make the run in good time can get up to my house and telephone from there. Will you try it? If my son is there tell him to come down at once."

"Yes, where is it?"

"Albion Harding's — at the left on the top of the West hill." It seemed that there was a note of surprise in the speaker's voice.

Reid handed Mr. Harding his light bag, and buttoned up his coat. He was a little dazed by the orders showered upon him, but he had no thought of disobeying. He walked rapidly off through the square until he was hidden by a line of tall office buildings, then he broke into a swift, steady run. He followed, without hesitation,

the direction which Mr. Harding's finger had pointed out, and after moments which seemed endless he turned in at the gate. He padded noiselessly across the lawn just as the single, mellow clock stroke rose from the valley.

A light burning in the hall cast a band of gold through the open door, but otherwise the house was dark, with the exception of a glimmering window on the third floor. Reid paused a moment irresolute, then ran up the broad veranda steps. His hand was already on the door when a rough voice from behind him cried,

"What do you want? Stop or I'll fire!"

On a sudden impulse of self-preservation, Reid sprang inside and closed the door. The massive lock clicked behind him. What was the meaning of this guarded, deserted house, this challenging sentry? A glimmering of the truth began to come to him, but there was no time for thought. Where was the telephone? where was Theodore Harding? Reid paused, then with a sudden resolve he darted upstairs, shouting at the top of his voice,

"Harding! Harding! Teddy Harding!"

The familiar name wakened long dormant chords of memory; and almost involuntarily Reid's lips opened in the old society cry,

"'Rah! 'Rah! Stamp!
'Rah! 'Rah! Seal
True and leal!
Harvard!"

The sounds echoed strangely through the deserted house and, from far above, came something stronger than an echo,

"True and leal!
Harvard."

A moment more and the two men were clasping hands.

There was no time for greetings. Reid gasped with the first breath which came to him,

"Where's the telephone? Your father sent me to stop the train at Wilmot. The strikers are lying for the scabs at the station."

"Thunder!" groaned Theodore. "Down in the library. That's what they locked me in up here for. The men listen to me sometimes."

They were running downstairs side by side to the dark library. Reid was conscious that the blows which had been crashing on the outer door during his brief rush upstairs had ceased. A sharp click and the room was flooded with light, another instant and Harding stood at the telephone, with the receiver in his hand.

"Hulloa!" he said sharply. His words were drowned for Reid by the shatter of glass some-

where at the rear of the house. He swung the library door to and locked it. The voice at the telephone was saying,

"Is that Wilmot Station? What? — Yes, Harding! Stop the 8:45 — 8:40, I mean, 8:40! The strikers are lying for the scabs at the station!"

— The thump of running feet sounded past the library door and up the oaken stairs.

"What? The strikers are lying for the scabs! What? Can't stop it? Then send it past — for Heaven's sake, send it past!"

Harding flung down the receiver. Heavy blows were sounding on the library door. In a flash he raised the window and swung himself over the sill, Reid following.

"We were in time," Harding said, for as they circled the house over the soft lawn, and emerged into the drive, they heard the distant shriek of the 8:40 as it left Wilmot.

Once out in the street again, the two men settled down to a steady run. At last they came out into the upper side of the square, where they could overlook the scene plainly.

There was utter silence in the big crowd,— a silence which jarred more upon the nerves than the loudest noise. All eyes were fixed on the

track. All ears were alert to catch the whistle of the oncoming train.

Suddenly without warning, with heat and fever of haste, it was upon them, forcing them to fall back upon each other by its onrush. Almost before they had grasped the meaning of the thing it had passed on into the darkness, leaving behind it a trail of golden sparks and a long mocking sigh.

CHAPTER III

Suddenly a woman's voice flared out sharply into the darkness.

"Albion Harding done it. I see him sendin' somebody somewhere."

The crowd was quickly busy piecing matters together. The murmur of comment rose into a growl that made Reid shiver with excitement and apprehension. Above the confused sound rose isolated voices,

"Come on, men! To Harding's! To Harding's!"

The cry ran from one to another, and the dark mass began to break up into little groups and stream to the northward. Reid missed his companion from his side, and saw that the slender figure stood in the street directly in the path of the mob. The high-pitched voice rang out in short, stern sentences. The speech was broken and disconnected, hardly a speech at all, but it

evidently went home; for when Harding paused with a disheartened break in his words someone in the crowd called cheerfully,

"What's the matter with Teddy?" and the dusky mass droned in good-humored response, "He's all right!"

Perhaps the discouragement of Harding's tones had touched the audience, for in some sudden change of mood all the anger of a moment before had vanished and they began to disperse rapidly.

Reid suddenly realized how tired he was. He dropped down upon the nearest curbstone and let group after group pass him. He was wondering as to the source of Theodore's power over men; and the answer came as he asked the question:

"It ain't anything Teddy says — he can't fling words round the way the old man can, but just see the difference! Nobody cared what Albion Harding said, but they all listened the minute Teddy piped up."

"Oh, he's all right. He knows he ain't any better'n anybody else."

"An' that ain't all. He knows about us, an' cares about us."

Here and there Reid caught details phrased in the polyglot English of the mill town; hints of fruit for a sick child, a loan in time of trouble,

a simple, wordless sympathy that counted beyond telling with these rough men and women.

How could it be? the listener questioned. Teddy Harding of college days had hardly a thought beyond his own pleasure, and now he held the hearts of a city of people in his hand. There was evidently much behind the blundering, boyish phrases. Reid remembered the ready friendliness, the open purse, the kindly tolerance of all sorts of mistakes and sins, which had made for Theodore Harding so many friends in college. He remembered that the men who had been loudest in their disapproval of him had been fond of him. He, himself had sought him out, after their free talk together, and had felt the same sweet, human element in a character otherwise rather slight. There came to him now, for the first time, a realization of the power of an uncritical love of humanity.

As he pondered half-dreamily, in the midst of his weariness, some further conversation reached his ears.

"What's the reason the boy is so popular? He doesn't begin to do as much for them as his father does," a hoarse voice asked from just behind him.

The answer came in tones that haunted Reid with their familiarity.

"Say yourself! Mr. Harding tries to help his men just as far as libraries and reading rooms will do it, and I think he honestly wants to make friends with them; only he doesn't know how."

"He never can get over the fact that he is Albion Harding," the other replied cynically. "I always feel that he's looking down on me, and I'm not so deuced thin-skinned, either."

"I know what you mean, Mr. Burnham. He doesn't so much give you the impression that he feels above you, as that he's trying not to."

"Hair-splitting, but not bad, Oakley!"

"It's true, and Teddy doesn't have any idea that he is better than anybody else."

"He's a good little chap, and he's got lots more business in him than his father gives him credit for."

As the two men moved away, Reid realized that it was his old friend Oakley who had been speaking, and that he was evidently a regular inhabitant of Underhill. Reid was glad that there was little chance of a meeting, and even relieved that Harding had disappeared. In his weariness and disheartenment, he dreaded the inevitable questions and comparisons of experience. He could now slip away quietly, telegraph a line regarding the night's happenings to the "Observer," and then seek some cheap lodging-house.

He was crossing the square to the telegraph office, when he heard a quick, light step behind him, and felt a hand on his arm.

"Where are you going, old man?" was Harding's brisk greeting.

"I was bound for the telegraph office, to send a message to the 'Observer.'"

The other waited until the message was sent, then he said heartily: "Well, how are you, Frank? We haven't had a chance for any of the compliments of the season. You don't know how good it seems to see you."

"Same here!" Reid answered with sincerity.

"You're coming home with me? Nonsense! of course you are fit. Father and I are alone. My mother and sister are away. I've been hunting all over for my father. Can't find him, but we won't wait any longer."

"He sent me up to your house."

"Yes, lots of people have seen him, he's all right. You'll come, won't you?"

The hospitality of Harding's voice was difficult to withstand, and Reid felt his resolution waning. Almost involuntarily he answered:

"Yes, since you are so good. It does seem good to see a Stamp and Seal man again."

"Doesn't it? You don't know how funny it felt to hear that old yell again. Up there, shut

up, and mad,— and then all of a sudden to hear you yelling. I tell you it went all over me like a flash. I felt like blubbering."

"How did you happen to be locked up there, anyway?"

"More than I know. Only I was up a big part of last night trying to straighten things out; and I was horribly sleepy, and went upstairs to my den for a nap. I slept over, and I'd just waked and found I was locked in, when I heard you shouting."

"Nobody back yet," he said a few minutes later, as they came within sight of the unlighted house. "We miss mother's supervision. I hoped the cook would be back. It's her night out and we were going to dine down town; but I didn't, you see. Come in here and I'll forage."

Reid followed his host into the library, and waited in a tired content for his return. He must have dozed, for he was roused suddenly by Theodore's entrance with a hastily collected luncheon.

"Now come along, Reid, tell me something about yourself," he said as they fell to eating hungrily.

"There isn't much to tell," said Reid, stiffening at the reminder of things which he had forgotten for a moment.

"Oh, but what have you been doing these four years? Something worth while, I'll be bound. You were on the 'Labor Gazette' the last I knew. But you spoke of the 'Observer' tonight."

"I left the 'Labor Gazette' two years ago. I couldn't stand the ground it took at the time of the Milldam Iron Strike."

"And then?"

"Of course I didn't get another editorial position. I was reporter on the New York 'Orbit,' but I fell out with the editor. He said I was too high-toned for the business, and I guess I was, as he ran it," and Reid smiled grimly. "That's all there is to me. Now tell me about yourself."

"There isn't anything to tell. There honestly isn't. I've just been here, busy learning the business from the start, trying to help the governor out. I haven't made a great success of it."

"Oh, I heard about the things you've been doing."

"What do you mean?"

"Little chance bits of gossip to the effect that you are the guardian angel of half of Underhill."

"Nonsense!" and Theodore flushed guiltily. "I haven't done anything."

"Then you've been imposing on them shamefully. They seemed to think you had."

"Have some more coffee, Reid. Don't you

find it good? I pride myself on my coffee making, I learned it camping." Then he paused with the coffee-pot raised, "I beg your pardon, perhaps you would rather have some wine? I never thought."

"No, thank you," Reid answered, perhaps with a question in his eyes, for Theodore said quietly:

"I've given it up myself. I thought it was just as well."

"Do you know, Teddy," Reid said frankly, "I'm proud of you."

"Well, anything I've amounted to so far you've had a hand in."

"What do you mean?"

Harding seldom spoke of such things as affected him most deeply; but the evening's happenings had moved him to confidence, and he went on with a rush:

"Do you remember your Founder's Day oration? 'Twas four years ago tonight."

"Yes, I was thinking this afternoon of all the fine theories I had then and how little they have stood by me."

"Some of them have stood by me pretty well," said Harding gravely. "Some of the things you said that night, and to me afterwards, stuck. They set me thinking. I must have been an awful little cad in college. I wonder you put

up with me at all. I've wanted to write and tell you how you helped me; but somehow I never got to it."

"You exaggerate my part in it, Teddy. But if I've helped you at all I'm glad. It helps take the edge off the general failure I've made of things."

Reid, looking at Theodore's face, thought how much it had changed for the better. The pointed, brown beard hid the suggestion of weakness about the chin, the dark eyes were at once keen and kind. There was the same high-bred, alert, eager contour of the whole face that had made someone compare him to a blooded fox-terrier. Even the lines of his slender figure, so perfect in proportion that he hardly seemed undersized, bore out the comparison. The face had aged unduly and the light showed premature threads of gray in the dark hair; but the boyish laugh and the spontaneous manner and speech were unchanged.

"Yes, Teddy," Reid reiterated after a thoughtful pause, "I'm proud of you."

CHAPTER IV

Theodore and Reid sat talking in the library until Mr. Harding returned. Late as it was when he arrived his day's work was not over, for he brought Roger Burnham with him. These two men presented strongly contrasted types, though neither was perhaps more thoroughly American than the other. In heavy figure, congested face, full lips and dogged chin, Burnham, man-of-the-world in all that the phrase may imply of dubious experience, was the antithesis of Harding. Yet both bore in subtle ways the marks of power.

Before Burnham lay a type-written list which he checked off in heavy black dots with a blunt pencil. At length he looked up with a grim smile.

"There are just four firms in the whole d — d pool that haven't made friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness to our certain knowledge. They may have to, for all we know. I'm sick of it."

"I admit that our experiment has not been a success. But what is to be done?" Mr. Harding often asked questions whose answers he knew.

"You know what is to be done — incorporate."

"But has the time come for that yet? There is sure to be decided objection in many quarters."

"How do you know?" Burnham asked keenly.

"Mr. Ordway, for one, would never consent to such a thing for a moment."

"Well, Ordway is only one. He's got a small factory, and a low-grade output. He don't count for much. Make sure of the others, and we can get along without him, if he can without us."

"That is very true," replied Mr. Harding. "We want him, however. It would be very unpleasant to have an independent firm here in Underhill with which we should come into collision all the time."

"Oh well, if you can get him over it's all the better, of course," replied Burnham tolerantly. "But you're too thin-skinned. It's the man's own lookout. Let him do as he pleases."

"There is really no reason why he should see matters in that light."

"He's got some sentimental objections about giving up his independence," Burnham replied with fine scorn. "Now I can't afford to consider sentiment."

"Mr. Ordway evidently can," Mr. Harding answered languidly.

"I asked him something about that the other day," Burnham volunteered, "and I gathered that he thought he was making money. He wasn't very definite, but I judged you or I wouldn't look at it in that light. He came up from the ranks, you know."

"Did he? That's interesting."

"Yes, it seems he grew up here in Underhill, and worked in your father's mill. Then he went West somewhere, got hold of some money, came back here and bought the Davis mill — that belonged to your father once, didn't it?"

"Yes, I sold it off when I first took the management of the business, and bought my Number Four."

"A good move too. Even then it couldn't have been up to Number Four."

"No, it was small and was in poor shape then. It can't be in any better condition now," Mr. Harding added reflectively.

"Well, Ordway never guesses it isn't the finest thing in the state. You ought to hear him talk about it. Proud as a man with his first kid — or horse. Yes, he holds he's making money."

"He has been in favor of giving way, in a measure at least, to the strikers throughout."

"He and that boy of yours have done a good deal toward making the matter drag on, by the stand they've taken." Burnham's tone was a little acrid.

"You can't wonder at Mr. Ordway's stand if he is a self-made man. His sympathies would naturally be with that class. But there is no such excuse for my son's conduct." A note of genuine dejection crept into the elder Harding's voice.

"Young blood! You have to stand a good deal from puppies in the hope they will grow up into self-respecting dogs some day," rejoined Burnham tolerantly.

Mr. Harding hardly relished having his son alluded to as a puppy. But the intention was evidently kindly and the point of view reassuring, so he changed the subject amicably.

"I really do not see how the smaller firms manage to keep alive in the midst of such competition."

"They don't!" laughed Burnham shortly. "Labor — spelled with a capital, curse it! — is getting so it asks more every day. Everybody is booming along, producing at full speed and putting the price down. A man has to have new and more expensive machinery all the time or else get hopelessly left. You've no idea what it

means, Harding, to a man without money behind him."

"The only solution is the one we are arriving at — mutual protection. With an association of all the manufacturers in the state or the country, an iron-bound agreement which shall regulate the price of raw material, and the output as well as the sales of the product, there's a chance for the small manufacturer."

"There's more chance for us all. I don't call myself a small manufacturer, though I suppose I am beside the amount of business you do,— but by G — ! I'm hard up. I'm just working along, inch by inch, keeping my head above water. I've got to sell some of my horses if things keep on this way. And a set of —— fools in Congress all the time tinkering tariff bills, till you never know where you stand."

"There is a great deal of truth in what you say. There is every reason in favor of incorporation. The difficulty will be to get those interested to see matters in that light. I never expected the pool would be a success, and my worst forebodings have been verified. It is too amorphous a form of union." A certain melancholy pleasure, as of the prophet verified, pervaded Mr. Harding's words.

"That's right, men have got to be tied down

to a thing so they can't get out of it. Otherwise — well, look at us — just as good as busted."

"We surely haven't succeeded in restricting buying or selling prices or in regulating the output, as we planned."

"That's right! Why, let me tell you what Ryerson's bookkeeper told me. Ryerson has been delivering pretty nearly a third more than his contracts called for! The transaction stood all right on the books, but he has managed in this way to undersell the regular price all winter."

Mr. Harding knit his brows as Burnham spoke, and then went on slowly:

"The pool has all the bad features of the regularly incorporated trust and none of the good ones. We have conspired to put down wages and buying prices, and put up selling prices. But there is no chance for the ultimate cheapening of the cost of production by a common management. It has no advantage as a fixed institution, but it is a good preparatory school for the trust, and I think the course must be about completed."

Burnham looked at his companion keenly.

"Did you think so far ahead as that, Harding?"

"I thought it altogether possible that our friends might learn the advantages of union even

if they did not find this method successful," Mr. Harding answered calmly.

"Oh, you're a foxy one. When are you going to broach the new scheme?"

"We must not hurry the matter unduly, but it is time to agitate it gently. I have been thinking of giving a dinner where we can talk it over a little."

"I'm with you there, of course," and Burnham's eyes twinkled. "I'm with you all through. There's money in the scheme, and I must confess money means a good deal to me just now."

"There's money in it and a great economic gain also. If unprosperous firms can be made flourishing and the price to consumers decreased at the same time, there is a double gain, such as seldom occurs." Mr. Harding broke off abruptly, knowing that Burnham would sympathize but little with what was to him the most alluring feature of the whole scheme. In a moment's time he continued briskly:

"If we say then a dinner a week from tonight. I will see that the invitations are sent out tomorrow."

After Burnham had gone, Mr. Harding resumed his seat by the window with a return of his customary self-approval. He had been discouraged earlier in the evening, as he received

one more proof that all his efforts had not been able to reach the hearts of his men. The affection which his son had gained apparently without exertion, his own painstaking care had not been able to secure. He had not been satisfied to control the lives and fortunes of his men; he wished to hold their hearts as well. Yet, disappointed in this, he contented himself with the knowledge that he had been master.

He knew triumph in the midst of defeat. The last conflict to be feared, he told himself with sanguine confidence, was over. Daylight would put a different face on the matter. He had little fear that the non-union workers would be attacked under the dictates of sunshine and cooler reason. The long strike was practically at an end. The men would gradually drift back when they saw that the mills could be run without them. The delay must be made up, extra hands would be needed, and there would be room for all. The scab labor would gradually float off in the fashion of such a shifting population, leaving Underhill in its normal condition again. The strike was almost over, and the employer was once more a victor. Moreover, there hovered in his mind gigantic, roseate visions of a future which he should control. It was with triumphant

tread and bearing that he at last took his way upstairs.

In a pause of the conversation next morning Mr. Harding said:

"By the way, Theodore, can you write some notes for me after breakfast?"

"How soon do you want them? I have a date with Rubinovitch at nine."

"Never mind, then. I wanted them to get into the morning's mail. But I can do them myself." Mr. Harding spoke resignedly.

"If I could be of any assistance, Mr. Harding," Reid said eagerly, "I shall have an idle hour after breakfast."

"Thank you, Mr. Reid. It would be a great favor. They are only dinner invitations."

When later Reid handed Mr. Harding the pile of notes, written in his neat upright hand, the latter looked at them critically.

"It has been my dream to have a private secretary who wrote a hand like that," he said half-jestingly.

Reid smiled and lingered with one of the letters in his hand.

"Do you know anything about William P. Ordway?" he said. "I knew a man of that name once in St. Louis. It can hardly be the same one, I suppose. He was foreman in a mill."

"Possibly, Mr. Ordway came up from the ranks, I believe. He is a short, stout man with red hair," Mr. Harding answered.

"That answers his description well enough. I must make sure. They were very kind to me then."

CHAPTER V

During the week which Reid spent with Theodore Harding he saw more of the father than of the son. Theodore was closeted all day long with one working man or another, and seemed to be the moving spirit in all measures leading to a settlement of the strike. Meanwhile Mr. Harding and Reid spent idle hours on the veranda, growing more and more intimate as their knowledge of each other's tastes deepened.

Theodore seldom joined in these long conversations; he sat silent when present, stroking his puppy's ears, or reading his favorite sporting magazine in the library. Sometimes he would retreat to the hammock in the pines and there pick his banjo deftly, with the ruddy setter-pup as sole listener. He seemed wholly unconscious of the growing affection between his father and his friend.

Reid's admiration for Mr. Harding made him

loth to decline when the latter offered him a position as his secretary. Journalism was still his chosen field of labor, though it had shown him little kindness; but this offer promised work not uncongenial, abundant leisure, and an income ample for one. He balanced the question according to his custom, but had arrived at a fixed decision one evening a week later when he went down to the Ordway's to supper.

He had not seen Mrs. Ordway nor her daughter before, but he found the older woman sitting alone on her tiny, vine-covered porch to greet him. Presently a tall, erect girl came up the path, holding a light paddle in her brown hand. Her mass of reddish hair was uncovered and her regular features and square, decided chin were burned by the warm sun of the river.

"There comes Faithy," said Mrs. Ordway. "She's changed, ain't she, since you see her last? Why, she must have been a little girl then —'bout fourteen or so. She's most twenty-one now — twenty-one the fifteenth of June."

Reid had already risen.

"Is this really you, Faith?" he said. "I can hardly believe it is the little girl I used to know."

Faith gave him her hand and looked at him with the same deep-blue eyes which he remem-

bered so well. The eyes, the hair straight and fine as thistle-down, the resolute chin, were those of the Faith he had known as a little girl. Otherwise she was strangely altered. He stood speechless, with some constraint before the familiar searching gaze. Neither spoke for a moment. Mrs. Ordway broke the awkward silence.

"Why don't you speak to Mr. Reid, Faithy? You ain't polite."

Faith laughed with a wholesome, cordial note that broke the pause pleasantly.

"I don't know what to say, mother. Mr. Reid and I have got to start over again. We've both grown up."

"One of us has, at any rate," Reid added. "I believe I was expecting to find you fifteen or sixteen. And I suppose I can't call her Faith any more,— can I, Mrs. Ordway?"

"Nonsense! Of course you can. 'Twould sound silly enough to hear you callin' her Miss Ordway," and Mrs. Ordway beamed with good fellowship.

"Then I shall have to, if your mother says I may. I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks."

"Well now! Mr. Reid, I know how old you are. You're only twenty-nine. You was twenty-two when you boarded with us an' taught in the high-school, wasn't you?"

"Yes, it was between my Freshman and Sophomore years at college. I was out two years."

"What have you been doing since you graduated, Mr. Reid?" Faith asked.

"I have been on different newspapers ever since. I came here for the Boston 'Observer.'"

"And do you like journalism?" queried Faith. The talk flowed a trifle stiffly at first.

"Yes, it's the only thing I would care to think of for steady work — as a profession, I mean. But a reporter's life is a hard one and the pay is not over good. I'm thinking of giving it up for awhile and going into business. Then when I get a tiny sum ahead —"

"It seems a pity. That was what you always meant to do. You used to say you were going to be editor of one of the big magazines," said Faith thoughtfully.

"My ambitions don't soar as high as that nowadays. The world takes a good deal of that out of one." Reid spoke a trifle sadly.

"Yes, more's the pity. The worst of growing old is that one loses one's ambition." Faith's tones were brisk, with nothing of disappointment about them.

"You can't know much about that personally," Reid smiled indulgently.

"Oh, but I do. I've lost all the ambitions I had. I wanted to be a nurse. I should have made a good one — perfectly well and strong, and with the knack; but father and mother couldn't spare me, and now I don't care." She smiled lovingly at her mother as she spoke.

"Nursing must be hard and very disagreeable. You wouldn't want to if you knew more about it."

"Oh, yes, I should. I was in a hospital three months. They thought I wouldn't like it, and so they let me go on probation. But I didn't get a bit tired of it; it was fascinating. But this is better."

Faith sat on the upper step of the veranda, turning the paddle lightly in her strong, brown hands. Reid looked down at the smoothly parted hair and the well-set head, as he leaned against the pillar beside her. He was getting his mind adjusted to the change in his pet and playmate. She had been a dumpy, awkward little girl, who bore her cross of red hair with a stoical defiance. Her obvious devotion had pleased and flattered Reid, and he made much of her, as he would otherwise hardly have done to the somewhat unattractive child. He had grown very fond of her, with a certain reflected affection born of her love for him. He re-

membered the look in her eyes when he had bidden her good-bye — a look older than the child's real age by many years. He wondered, and was ashamed of the thought, if he had still the power to call up such an expression.

Mrs. Ordway's next remark chimed in strangely with his thought.

"We all used to think a sight of you, Mr. Reid, an' we do now, for that matter. But I guess there didn't either of us older folks think so much of you as Faithy did. She's always kept wondering where you was and why you didn't write."

Reid was troubled at the thought that he had been unmindful of these generous friends, and answered penitently:

"It was very ungrateful of me to seem to forget your kindness in that way. Believe me, it was only in the seeming; I would have written if I had thought you cared particularly. But there wasn't anything of importance to write about, and I put it off from week to week."

"Yes, I kep' tellin' father an' Faithy 'twas that way. I'm a poor hand to write myself an' I know how it is."

A half hour later Mrs. Ordway beamed from behind the coffee-pot over the generously spread table. It was an admirable supper, from

her standpoint or any other, and she naturally contrasted the days of plenty with the days of dearth. Something of this came to her lips.

"This ain't much like the times, Mr. Reid, when you used to board with us and we had to do most anyway to make things come together."

"I didn't see much of that side of the matter, Mrs. Ordway. There always seemed to be enough."

"Well, you never knew how much your board money meant to us. But we've pulled through that now. I tell father he'll be building a mansion up on the hill pretty soon, like Mr. Harding's. I expect that's pretty fine, now, isn't it?"

"It is certainly a beautiful house, but after all comfortable rather than fine," Reid answered absently.

"I never thought I should feel at home in such a big house, an' 'twould seem kind of lonesome up on the hill," Mrs. Ordway went on comfortably. "I've lived right down amongst folks ever sence I was married, and I don't s'pose I'd ever feel satisfied not to see something goin' on. I guess this house suits me well enough. It's big enough for us, an' I do' know's I want to move, even if we do all git rich from bein' mixed up with the big bugs."

"You better not count too much on that,

mother," said Mr. Ordway, breaking his habitual silence. "It's full as likely to work the other way. I don't take much stock in these new-fangled schemes for makin' money."

"I judge nevertheless that things are pretty hard for the producer, just now?" Reid queried.

"I ain't complaining. It don't look as if I was havin' hard times, does it?" and he looked complacently about him.

"No, it certainly doesn't; but Mr. Harding spoke as if many of the manufacturers felt differently."

"Mr. Harding!" grunted Ordway, "I don't take much stock in your Mr. Harding."

"Why not, Mr. Ordway?" asked Reid puzzled. So far as he had seen Mr. Harding seemed to inspire profound respect if not love.

"Oh, he's too slick, his hands are too white. He talks too much."

"It isn't exactly fair, is it, father, to be down on him for those things?" asked Faith quietly.

"Of course 'taint, Faithy. But it's one of those things you can't help. I don't like him an' I don't trust him."

"I was real proud of father being invited up there to dinner, but I don't think it pleased him a mite," Mrs. Ordway interpolated. "Now I

think Mr. Harding is as well-appearing a man as you need ask to see anywheres."

"Appears too well; just what I said," came Mr. Ordway's laconic comment.

"Then you don't favor the agreement, pool, whatever you call it?" said Reid, turning the talk upon less personal matters.

"I did last night,— at any rate I didn't say anything against it. I suppose I was so stuffed with wine and good things that I felt good. At any rate I lost my sense."

"Did they have wine, father?" queried Mrs. Ordway in awe-struck tones. To her mind spirituous liquors were things to be used only in case of dire illness and then with fear and trembling.

"Yes, all sorts. An' we all drank it, an' got so meller and sociable that we agreed to anything Albion Harding said."

"P'raps that's what he done it for," said Mrs. Ordway with cunning.

"P'raps 'twas," her husband answered drily.

"Just what do you object to in the scheme, Mr. Ordway?" Reid asked persistently, returning to the attack. This blunt, unschooled viewpoint interested the artistic side of his nature.

Mr. Ordway was in no way reticent in regard to his opinion. He had cast off his customary taciturnity. It seemed that he had been brood-

ing over the events of the evening before throughout the day, so that it was a relief to him to speak. He went on judicially:

"Wal, I'll tell you what, I ain't never approved of the pool. I'm too old-fashioned, I guess,—at any rate, the old-fashioned ways of doing things are good enough for me. We ain't be'n runnin' things on the square for the last two years. I see it an' I made up my mind I'd quit. But when it comes to all this talk they's be'n lately, it's too much for me. It's bein' bossed that goes against me as much as anythin'."

"But I don't see that you are being bossed. Isn't it the vote of the majority that decides the question?" Reid persisted.

"It looks so from outside, but I tell you Albion Harding's the majority. He owns three mills outright, and nobody knows how many more so far's the greater part of the interest is concerned. At any rate, some of those men don't dare say their souls are their own when he speaks."

"The authority might be in worse hands, at any rate. Mr. Harding is keen and level-headed, and more than that he means well; and I have no doubt is perfectly sincere in thinking that the manufacturer needs protection." Reid thoroughly believed with Mr. Harding, and was glad that

he could support his future employer with perfect sincerity.

"All that may be," Ordway rejoined stubbornly. "It don't do a mite of good to argue with me. I know a scheme to gouge fortunes out of poor, plain people as far as I can see it. I've been a poor man myself all my life and I've seen how 'tis. The more a man has the more he wants, and the harder he's goin' to work to get it."

"I don't think you're just to Mr. Harding, father," Mrs. Ordway put in pacifically. "I'm sure he's a good man. Look how generous he is. He's treasurer of the missionary society, busy as he is, an' don't take a cent of pay; an' he gives money everywhere. Everybody that's hard-up or wants money for anything special goes to him. An' if you'd only go to prayer-meetin' Friday nights you'd hear what beautiful things he says. He's better than the minister any day."

"It's easy enough to say beautiful things,— at least it is for him. 'Twouldn't be for me. And as for the missions, he's got plenty of money,— what does that amount to? Oh, yes, he talks fair enough, but he don't keep me from seein' that this is a scheme for takin' money away

from the poor people an' givin' it to the rich. It's always the way."

He paused and a silence followed which was broken by Mr. Ordway himself.

"There's one thing about it," he said reluctantly. "There's goin' to be more chance for savin' in a stronger organization than there's b'en in the pool. There's goin' to be more of a show for the gains bein' fair ones."

"Then you think a stronger organization would be less objectionable after all?" Reid asked a little eagerly.

"I s'pose 'twould, but I ain't in favor of it, by any means. I want to go my own way jest as I always did, an' I never wanted to do anything else. Why I went an' agreed to anything of the sort I don't know. Yes, I do know, too, d — n it! I was a silly fool! I was flattered at settin' there in Albion Harding's big dinin' room, an' drinkin' his wine,— me that had eat my dinner out of a tin pail in his father's mill for years. He turned my head with his 'Mr. Ordway' this an' his 'Mr. Ordway' that."

"Father, I'm ashamed of you!" Mrs. Ordway interrupted as soon as she could make herself heard through this outburst. "Do you know what you said?"

"I didn't mean to, Matty," Mr. Ordway re-

plied apologetically. "But I do git so riled when I think what I've done. Mebbe if I'd held out, some of the rest might have. If somebody had only made them see the other side! I don't s'pose I could have made plain how I felt about it, but I should feel better if I had tried."

"Of course I haven't thought over the matter as you have, but I have a feeling that you are looking on the dark side altogether too much, Mr. Ordway," Reid put in in reassuring tones.

"The worst of it is I don't have a mite of confidence in Mr. Harding. Mebbe he did mean some of the things he said when he said 'em; but I tell you he's all taken up seein' what he can do. It's more for the sake of havin' somethin' to run an' manage, than anythin' else. I've known him in a sort of way ever sense he come home from foreign parts an' took the business after his father died; an' I know it's the breath of his life to manage things. He's kep' pretty straight an' clean for a man mixed up in so many things; I ain't never heard a word said against his private life. But you can't always tell,—sometimes it's the men like that that goes to smash the hardest. All I have to say is that Albion Harding ain't the kind of man I'd like to trust my happiness and my fortunes to. Too much power ain't good for some men. I've

thought sometimes that if Caesar and Napoleon and the fellers we read about in the history hadn't had any power they'd have been better men,— if they'd just stayed at home, and plowed an' things."

William Ordway rose abruptly from the table and left the room, only to pace the piazza restlessly. Reid knew that some unusual excitement possessed the plain man. He was a rare speaker, and then only in monosyllables and in reply to questions. This evening, however, he had discoursed at length and with a certain rude eloquence and effectiveness which surprised at least one of his auditors. He had evidently been brooding over the matter all day, and could no longer restrain himself in the presence of a sympathetic audience.

As his steps echoed sharply on the veranda, Mrs. Ordway undertook to apologize.

"I'm sure Mr. Harding's a fine man, Mr. Reid, an' I don't want you should think father meant half what he said. It wasn't very polite of him to speak so about a friend of yours anyway; but he's all wrought up over it ever since last night. He didn't sleep hardly a wink. 'Twas between twelve and one when he got home, an' then he turned and twisted till most mornin'. He said he guessed 'twas the coffee,—

'twas awful strong and black an' there wasn't any milk to put in it. I s'pose the girl forgot it, Mrs. Harding not bein' there, an' she havin' everything to tend to herself; but father said Mr. Harding didn't say a word, an' drank it down as if 'twas the way he wanted it. I thought 'twas real considerate of him not to make a fuss about it an' hurt her feelin's. But anyway, it kep' father awake an' helped git him all wrought up."

"The factory means a great deal to father," Faith added at the end of her mother's monologue. "He always worked there until we went away from here. He was there when Mr. Harding's father owned it. His life has gone into it as much as if he had always owned it himself."

"Yes, that was the first thing he done when he come into that money. He wrote back here to Underhill to see if he could buy the factory," Mrs. Ordway added.

"Then you had a sudden stroke of luck, Mrs. Ordway?"

"Bless you, yes! We never could have scraped together so much. You see father had a brother, a sort of rovin' critter, an' he died an' left him this piece of kind of waste land. It didn't appear to be wuth much then; but they discovered oil on it, an' he sold it for a good

price. It don't seem so much now as it did then, I guess, an' 'twouldn't be much for some folks — but we're satisfied."

"It was the dearest thing — the way father took it"— said Faith with a touch of strong feeling in her voice. "After we had moved here he used to go down to the mill every night to see if it was all right, just as if it had been alive. And when he came back he always said, 'Yes, 'twas the only thing that kept my spirits up all through that time,— saying to myself, "I'll be master here some day."' It's nice to see a man get what he wants most once in a while."

Just then Mr. Ordway entered the dining-room, where the three still lingered about the table.

"See here, Reid," he said, concisely, "I've said a lot of things to you that you can tell Mr. Harding or not just as you please. They're no more than I should be willing to say to him. I expect I shall, some time. There's another thing that I expect to tell him before long; and that is that I shan't stay in his pool, combine, or whatever he calls it, another week. But I ain't come to it yet. I want to think about it a little more. It ain't all the moral side of it, I don't pretend, though I've always been on the

square, an' it's gittin' most too late to change; but I can't stand bein' dictated to, an' I won't, by Albion Harding or anybody else."

CHAPTER VI

As the summer passed, Mr. Harding, deep in business of a scope far wider than any one knew, grew to depend on Reid at every turn. He often contrasted Theodore's straggling boyish hand, his unreliable spelling, his faulty rhetoric, with Reid's delicate precision; and compared his son's blunt statements with Reid's tactful diplomacy. The contrast could not fail to be hurtful to Theodore, even though his faults in the clerical line were more than counterbalanced by his painstaking attention to trivial details, and his influence with the men. Theodore had insisted on learning the business from the start. He had worked faithfully in the mills for months, gaining a perfect knowledge of the processes, but in a subtle way he had still further lowered his status with his father, who never relished the sight of his son in overalls and jumper. It argued, in Mr. Harding's mind, some lack of breeding that

his son should meet on terms of equality with his own workmen.

In Reid, however, Mr. Harding found a most congenial companion. He grew to value the young man's opinions, especially on theoretical matters, and discussed such topics freely with him. So one morning as they sat at work Mr. Harding said abruptly:

"What do you think about this pooling business, Mr. Reid? You have studied political economy, and so must have struck this phase of the matter in college. There weren't such things as pools to consider in my day."

Reid was a little surprised at this open admission of a limitation, but answered after a slight pause:

"Frankly, Mr. Harding, I don't believe in pools. They have all the bad features of the regular combine and none of the good ones."

"Such as the saving by combined management, etc.?" Mr. Harding queried, though he knew well enough Reid's meaning.

"Yes, just that. Then they are underhanded in their very essence and so are absolutely unrestrained."

"In point of fact they are illegal, I suppose," Mr. Harding continued, thoughtfully.

Theodore, who had entered quietly at the be-

ginning of the conversation, half-swung in his chair and spoke impulsively:

"Why don't you drop the business altogether, father? They're more harm than good — combines of any sort."

"You cannot dismiss them carelessly like that, Theodore. You are ignoring the whole trend of modern business. They demand attention." Mr. Harding's tone was a little ruffled.

"I suppose I'm old-fashioned, but it seems to me there's nothing like good, brisk competition for working things out," Theodore answered. 'Competition is the soul of trade,' you know."

"That is so old a proverb it may have well become obsolete. I should amend it to read 'Combination is the soul of trade,'" Mr. Harding answered with dignity.

"Then trade hasn't much of a soul," Theodore retorted.

Reid laughed.

"There's a great fad nowadays for talking of corporate greed, but there's just as much real avarice outside the corporations as in them, Teddy; you get a little more lime-light on it in the mass, that's all."

"Competition has some charges against it, Theodore," Mr. Harding continued earnestly. "Prices fluctuate and upset the stock market

just the same under a competitive régime, and the small producer now and then gets wrecked without the aid of the combine. In fact, the trust does away in a measure with these things."

"Yes, by steadying prices away up above normal, and wrecking the small producer itself."

"You would have hard work to prove these assertions, Teddy," said Reid. "They are every-day talk, I know, but the proof lies all the other way. I can prove to you with figures, this minute, that the Standard Oil Company has steadily lowered the selling price of oil for the last fifteen years."

"You can prove that prices have fallen, but you can't prove that they have fallen as much as they would have done without combination, and can you prove that the quality of the oil hasn't grown poorer?" Theodore retorted, warmly.

"The first doesn't admit of proof, of course. They meet the second charge satisfactorily by saying that they haven't learned yet how to refine the Ohio oil."

"Shucks!" said Theodore, inelegantly.

"Mind, Mr. Reid and I are not trying to contend that the charges brought against the trust have not almost all some foundation in fact."

Mr. Harding spoke earnestly and with great emphasis. His project had come to be very dear to him. "The point I make is that they are not necessary features of combination. Private firms, too, have debased the product, ruined competitors, lowered wages. All I claim is that the essential features of trusts are all for the legitimate furtherance of trade."

"Then all I've got to say is that our union — whatever you call it — isn't a trust," Theodore retorted.

"It never claimed to be. Mr. Reid and I were saying that it has the evil features of the trust and none of the good ones."

"Then I move we drop it, father," Theodore reiterated, eagerly. "I've been wanting to say this for a long time, and have been afraid it would annoy you. But I can't stand this business. It's killing my self-respect."

"You look at the matter from too emotional a standpoint, Theodore," his father answered. His son's feeling, the energy of his criticism, both annoyed Mr. Harding; the fact that such a display of emotion was rare only emphasized the implied criticism.

Theodore flushed hotly as he answered his father's charge.

"I don't think you are quite fair to me, father. It is a serious matter to me," he replied.

"I don't think I fail to recognize its importance, but I regard it from a different point of view. I maintain that we must find some substitute for the pool. Your suggestion that we give up the matter does not face the difficulty."

"I don't see any difficulty. We were getting on well enough as we were. We had all the money we needed."

"I'm not thinking of our interests in this matter. We are all right. But the other manufacturers — Mr. Burnham says —"

"Don't believe anything that Roger Burnham says. He is absolutely unreliable," Theodore said, emphatically.

"I must judge of that for myself."

"But do you know, father, what people in general think of Roger Burnham? He is absolutely unscrupulous in his business methods, and a confirmed gambler," the younger man persisted.

"Do you know these things?" Mr. Harding queried sharply.

"Of course not by experience." Theodore's tones showed that he recognized the weakness of his self-justification. "But everybody says so."

"Such testimony isn't to be relied on in the least," Mr. Harding replied serenely. "I find Mr. Burnham a man of keen business judgment and considerable insight. Further than that I do not care to go. I have no intention of making him my familiar friend."

"Well, I'm sorry to have his name mixed up with yours in any enterprise, that's all," Theodore reiterated.

"I fancy mine will stand the strain," and Mr. Harding smiled in genuine amusement. "The man is a good agent if well controlled. But in regard to this question of dropping the pool, we may as well talk it out once for all, my son. Do you not think the plan which we discussed ineffectually last spring, for changing our informal agreement into an incorporated combination, solves the difficulty?"

"I don't see that it makes it much better," Theodore retorted doggedly. "It's just here, father. Trusts might do all these good things that you have mentioned, but they don't."

"Will you be so good as to state clearly, Theodore, your objection to combines?" Mr. Harding said with the air of propounding a puzzle.

"I think the amount of power they have is dangerous. There's the matter in a nutshell," Theodore answered promptly. "There aren't

many men who can stand the chance it gives for the increase of money and power. Look into the history of almost any trust. You'll find it full of disgraceful things. I'll leave it to you, Reid, if it isn't so."

"I suppose there is something in what you say," Reid answered slowly. "But, as your father says, these things are not an essential part of the combine; a trust could be conducted successfully without them. Its prosperity wouldn't be so rapid or so dazzling, but it would be even more sure in the end — that is, the trust in the abstract, in the ideal."

"There isn't any such thing — and if there is it isn't worth considering. We have to think of the practical workings," Theodore answered a trifle crossly.

"It is my opinion that it is a worthy mission for some man to prove that the ideal trust is possible." Mr. Harding's cool eyes kindled as he pictured himself in the rôle. "I believe that a combine can be incorporated at not a cent above its real valuation, and can effect savings without debasing the product or cutting down the price it pays for raw material. With the great capital at its command it is going to be able to utilize its by-products effectively, and take every advantage of the state of the market. Moreover

it can save tremendously in running expenses with one head man for four of the old régime. It can buy up rivals instead of being obliged to ruin them. It may even be able to reduce its selling price and share its prosperity with the public. And the man who proves that this is possible will do more for modern economic theory than any maker of books," he ended triumphantly.

"I shall feel better about it when I see it done," said Theodore shortly. "I'm going down to Number Three."

Mr. Harding turned to Reid as the footsteps died away on the stairs.

"Theodore is very likely to be governed by his feelings, and has little regard for abstract reasoning. His temperament is very like his mother's. He has a good head for business, however, and will do well in a small way. I hope to fulfill my purpose in my lifetime, and if I can leave everything compact and manageable for him I shall feel that I have not lived in vain," he said formally.

"You can hardly feel that, under any circumstances, you are so well developed on many sides. The man who is primarily a business man seldom gets more than a superficial culture from art and

literature." Reid was at no pains to conceal his admiration from its object.

"It may be true. My father was a business man and my grandfather a clergyman. Possibly I may have a little of both about me. Then, too, I did not spend in drudgery the years in which a man forms his tastes. My training was primarily on the literary and artistic side." Mr. Harding liked to talk about himself to a really sympathetic listener.

"Where did you study?" Reid questioned.

"I was a Harvard man, like my son. Then I was two years in a German university, then music at Leipsic. As Thackeray said, 'I lacked only talent and application to be at the height of my profession.' No, I am not fair to myself there. I really did work hard at my music. I might have made something of it if I had not been called home."

"Business must have been a great change for you after a life of study." From his knowledge of the man Reid could guess something of what the sacrifice must have been.

"It was. I rebelled bitterly at first; but I was in a way forced into it, and I found that business was undoubtedly my *métier*. Sometimes I feel famished, even after all these years,

for the old things. But it is something to have had my boyish life."

"It must be everything," Reid replied sympathetically.

Mr. Harding could speak freely to the young man of an alien name. He could enter into Reid's difficulties far better than into the struggles of his own son. He had long since given up the effort to find kinship with his child. He had fed his own young mind with the classics, and saw with disgust that his son preferred boys' books of adventure. He himself had early grown to love the organ, while Theodore had thrown aside the violin after years of unwilling practice and had taken up the banjo with enthusiasm. True, all the things in which the son had failed to come up to Mr. Harding's ideals formed but slight defects in a character honorable, pure, unselfish, which had even laid aside with unexpected resolution all traces of boyish wildness. Mr. Harding, however, wished to be Providence in his family, and here he had been powerless.

As he climbed the hill to luncheon through the August noon, two figures on horseback slowly preceded him. He realized with an unpleasant start that he had seen his daughter and Marcus Oakley together often of late. Althea was, to be

sure, but a little girl just out of school; suspicions seemed ungrounded, but Mr. Harding's business caution was aroused.

Althea came down into the library a few minutes later, flushed and charming. She crossed the room and perched on the arm of her father's chair.

"Oh, when will luncheon be ready? Aren't you almost starved?" she sighed as she touched his silvery hair with one finger.

"You must have found it very warm riding, little girl," he said absent-mindedly.

"Yes, we went out toward Riplay. Mr. Oakley had business there."

"He isn't troubled that way often, is he?" Mr. Harding queried.

"In what way?" Althea asked quickly.

"With business. It must be very hard for a young man without means — this building up a practice. And I believe he has debts to bother him." The tones were cool and deliberate.

"I'm sure he didn't make them being extravagant. He spends hardly anything," said Althea, coming to her friend's defence.

"No, necessary college debts, I think. It is unfortunate for a young man to be obliged to spend the best years of his life in paying off such liabilities. It hampers him in every way. Oak-

ley is fortunate, however, in not being entangled in any love affair."

"Yes," said Althea, in a low voice.

"A young man who is hampered with debts and marries," Mr. Harding went on in a general and philosophical tone, "is most unwise and usually most unhappy. Of course, if he choses a young woman accustomed to poverty and of a frugal disposition —"

"Like John Gilpin's wife, 'of a frugal mind,'" amended Althea. "There's the luncheon bell," as a single silvery note struck in the hall. "Where's Teddy?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him since half-past ten or thereabouts."

"He is going to umpire a game of ball between the boys of Number One and Number Two this afternoon. I pity them all — it's so hot."

"Theodore's tastes surely are incomprehensible. He will stand there in the sun with his hands on his knees and his legs astride all the afternoon and shout himself hoarse, and call it enjoyment," Mr. Harding responded in vexed tones.

"He didn't want to, today," said Althea loyally, "but the boys were going to be so disappointed."

CHAPTER VII

Unrest abode beneath leisurely beauty and genial hospitality in the big house on the hill that summer. Albion Harding chafed over the slow maturing of his plans and his son's incipient revolt, and Theodore was restless beneath the indifference of the woman he loved, and sensitive to his father's unspoken criticism. Althea found life endurable only as it brought her nearer to Marcus Oakley, although her passionate, unbalanced nature found in meeting nothing but pain. Mrs. Harding, alone, lived out her placid, beautiful life, untroubled by economic theories and haunting, unsatisfied affection.

She had been a happy woman since the time when, a girl of twenty, she had married Albion Harding. Her satisfaction with her lot was complete, and she went but unwillingly from home. Nothing that she saw elsewhere was so lovely to her as the blue river winding down

from the blue hills southward through its meadows. She loved her wide, airy house and the daily routine of its care, the entertainment of guests, and the whole round of her ordered life. No sorrow had ever touched her closely; one shadow of trouble only had visited her — the lack of concord between her husband and her son. Though not brilliant herself, she had the faculty of making others appear so. She never made mistakes in planning house-parties or seating her guests; she had a genius for breaking up unpleasant *tête-à-têtes* and leavening a whole company with good feeling.

Her peaceful atmosphere was an unfailing solace and refuge to more than one worried man or tired woman. She was not the least of the attractions which brought Reid and Oakley up the hill on summer nights. So on a breathless evening in August the two young men left the lodging in the valley which they shared, sure of some amelioration of their mood on the West Hill. The sun had already set and the gathering twilight was full of the tireless noise of insects; the air was heavy and lifeless. In the west dark banks of clouds lay piled, pierced now and then by flashes of lightning.

A heavy silence seemed to reign on the veranda. Hammocks and lounging chairs were

grouped within speaking distance, but no one seemed to care for speech. Margaret Favor sat listless and quiet in the light from the hall lamp, with her slender hands folded in her lap. Her father's cigar tip gleamed a little remote. Theodore's white figure lay stretched in the hammock with the pup, a dark ball, beside him, and the white dresses of Mrs. Harding and Althea were visible near by. The new-comers were conscious of a mingling of relaxation and tension in the air, of restlessness and repose. It was a night when things of importance might happen.

General Favor broke the long silence which Mrs. Harding had been too wise to attempt to stem with small talk.

"I hear your pool isn't turning out a great success, Harding?"

"Indeed! one can hear almost anything if one attends to it industriously," Mr. Harding replied coldly.

General Favor laughed with unruffled good humor.

"Scored, Harding! But really, I'm interested. We're all interested. I heard you were talking of incorporating, and I suppose if you do you'll let your friends in on the ground floor in the matter of stock. I shall put in every penny I can raise. I suppose you'll pay big dividends."

"I cannot say," Mr. Harding responded rather severely. "Our aim is primarily the protection of the smaller manufacturers."

"Of course, the philanthropy of the trust has become proverbial," said Margaret slowly and stingingly.

Mr. Harding bit his lip. He dreaded for some unexplained reason to have his motives closely analyzed. Margaret's cynicism troubled him vaguely and irritated him still more. But he chose to ignore her challenge to battle, rightly judging that his silence would annoy her more than scathing words.

"Then you agree with me about trusts?" Theodore asked a trifle wistfully.

"Oh, that can't be," Margaret smiled. "We never did agree about anything. We mustn't. If you favor trusts I shall oppose them and the other way — just for the sake of old times."

"I wish you'd let up on joking and talk sense," Theodore said bluntly.

"Impossible,— how can you ask it?"

"Honestly, what do you think about them?" He pressed the point eagerly, regardless of the fact that there were other auditors.

"I think the trust is the one safeguard of the country," she responded promptly.

"You are letting your girlish enthusiasm run

away with you, Miss Margaret," said Mr. Harding dryly. "But the cause is fortunate with so fair a champion."

"Besides, if it weren't for the pleasant little ways of the creature, life would lose a great deal of its interest. For instance, what would the newspapers do? I was reading an interesting thing the other day about a corporation which carted away by night a rival factory," the girl continued sweetly.

"Nonsense, Margaret, you didn't believe that, I hope," said General Favor with paternal directness. "You can't believe anything you read on that subject. The newspapers that aren't in the pay of the corporations abuse them to gain the public ear."

"That's a bad showing for the papers, General Favor," said Reid, stung by the statement. "It's one that you would find it hard to prove."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, my boy. I forgot that we had a newspaper man among us."

"Your statement is absurd on the face of it, father," Margaret added. "Don't you know that there isn't a trust in the country that would buy up a newspaper? Mr. Harding and I know it, don't we, Mr. Harding?"

There was no response. Mr. Harding's se-

rene silence at once rebuked the girl's impertinence and concealed his annoyance.

General Favor rose with a ponderous sigh.

"I'm going home," he said with the freedom permitted to life-long neighbors. "It can't be any hotter there than it is here, and, at least, you don't have to talk. You folks aren't any of you my build. Lean people don't know what hot weather is. Are you coming, Margaret?"

"I don't think I'll ever come. It will be far easier to stay here," said Margaret languidly. Theodore turned uneasily in the hammock and the dog whined.

As General Favor's heavy tread echoed down the gravel walk, Mr. Harding rose and silently vanished. A sudden longing had come over him for his big music room with its arched ceiling, carved dark wood, windows open to north and south and east, and rows of shining organ keys.

Althea rose as her father disappeared; the casual, general conversation had no interest for her. She had felt at times that she must cry out as she listened to Margaret's slow, honey-sweet voice. Though it could bring her only pain and unsatisfied craving, she longed to be alone with Oakley. She had something of importance to tell him.

"Let's go down to the summer house," she

said abruptly. "The moon must be just about rising, and, as General Favor says, it can't be any hotter there."

Margaret rose and Reid followed her example. Then, seeing that Theodore had moved also, he sank into his seat again. He honestly meant not to interfere in a matter which seemed serious to his friend.

"Shall we go down with these young people, Mrs. Harding, or shall we stay here?" he questioned.

"I don't think I care to go, Mr. Reid, but don't let that keep you."

"Shall we stay here and talk? Go on, sentimental young creatures, and look at the moon," and Reid waved the four a light farewell.

They passed around the east wing where Mr. Harding's music already swelled out into the hot darkness. Now and then a sullen, distant peal of thunder echoed the lower notes of the organ. The black clouds were slowly rising higher and higher, and were pierced more and more frequently by lightning flashes. It had hardly rained for a month and in the dewless night the grass was dry and warm to the feet. On the crest of the hill was a little, honeysuckle-covered arbor, a relic of the days of the clergyman grandfather. There he had been accustomed, so tra-

dition said, to compose his stern sermons, his mild old face beaming as he consigned the wicked to eternal fire, in a deftly turned phrase. Here his matter-of-fact descendant seated himself with the cynical, modern lady of his love.

Althea and Oakley, however, walked on in silence to a rustic seat, half-buried in the branches of a giant fir. From a distance came the throb of the organ and the irregular detonations of the thunder. For a time they hardly spoke. The full moon rising showed Althea's dark eyes and her thin, dusky arms through the sheer muslin of her gown. Oakley, gazing fixedly over the pale lights of the valley, was striving for self-control.

"Mother and I are going abroad in September. They have decided." Althea broke the silence in a hard voice.

"I thought you were going to spend the winter in New York, and be a great social success." Oakley tried to speak lightly, but his voice betrayed him.

"They changed their mind," said Althea quietly.

"You will stay some time when you once get across, I suppose," said Oakley, talking against time. "I always thought nothing less than two years would satisfy me."

"Nothing at all would satisfy me. I don't want to go."

"You have only to say so, then, of course. They are doing it to please you," the young man blundered.

"They're not. They're doing it to get me away from you. They know I love you, Marcus; don't you care for me a bit? If you don't I shall die!"

The words came slowly at first and then with a rush, breaking down Oakley's wall of reserve. In a moment he held the slight form clasped in his arms.

"Althea, you know I do," he murmured.

There was a long pause. Althea was sobbing, but in a not altogether heart-broken way. She was the first to break the silence.

"If you loved me why didn't you tell me? You treated me just as you did every one else. I am so miserable."

"I tried hard to. Don't you see why?" he said softly. "It was the only thing for me to do. I can't ask you to be my wife. I have nothing at all, and you are so young. You are nothing but a child."

"Oh, Marcus, I'm not. I've felt so old the last week. And mother was married when she

was twenty, and I'm eighteen now. It needn't be for a long time yet. We can wait years," she pleaded like a wilful child.

"But it isn't fair to you, dear. You are young and may see someone you care more for. I'm not willing to bind you. I don't think it would be the happiest thing for you. Long engagements aren't often happy."

"Well, we needn't be engaged so very long. I could learn to keep house. I can work," Althea protested.

"You work!" Oakley laughed softly. "That's just what I don't want to see you doing. When I can offer you comfort and something like the ease which you have enjoyed at home, I shall ask you to share it, but not until then. I love you with all my heart and always shall."

"Father would help us, I know he would."

"Althea, do you think I would let him?"

"But you said you wanted to do what would make me happiest." Althea's dusky little face was instinct with passionate surprise. She had seen for herself a clear solution of the whole matter, and had expected that it would appeal at once to her lover.

"Do you think that I could purchase even your happiness with my self-respect?"

The girl was abashed before Oakley's sudden

indignation. She looked down over the valley with the red moon already mounting over its lights.

"Your father will think it very wrong to have spoken to you, Althea," Oakley said at length, drawing her still closer.

"I suppose he will. He thinks a great deal of money and position."

"And I have neither," Oakley said. "And yet I have presumed to love his daughter."

"I shall tell him exactly how it was," said Althea from the safe shelter of her lover's arm. "I shall tell him that I made you say it, that it wasn't your fault."

"You will do nothing of the kind, you brave child," and he covered the thin cheek with kisses. "Confess, now, that it would frighten you half to death."

"Of course it would. I'm not exactly afraid of father, but it's not far from it. He never shows that he is angry, and he is always perfectly polite, no matter how you have displeased him; but his standards are so high — or something — oh, he will think what I said to you was dreadful. Marcus, do *you?*" she shuddered nervously and clung closer to Oakley as she questioned him.

"No, dearest, you only gave me a chance to say something I have wanted to for so long, but

didn't for your sake. Does it seem very hard-hearted, when I knew you cared, not to —"

"Did you know I cared?" she asked sharply. Oakley was angry with himself for his want of tact.

"I was afraid so. It seemed to me your eyes told it to me sometimes. I didn't see why you should love such a poor sort of a fellow — and such a coward. But I was a coward for you, dear. I was afraid of making you wretched."

"I want you to understand all about it, dear," he said again after a pause. "I shall be a poor sort of lover. I can't give you beautiful presents and a handsome engagement ring, and take you to the theater and parties as a rich man could. You will be ashamed of your shabby lover, dearest."

"Never," she said softly. "I love him just as he is better than I could any other way."

"I think I ought to speak to your father to-night, don't you, Althea?" Oakley said at last. "It is his right to know at once."

"*I* ought to."

"Nonsense, you can speak to him later. And mind you don't make any of those dreadful revelations you threatened," Oakley laughed.

"We must go up now. It must be getting late. I haven't heard the organ for some time."

Althea was suddenly startled by a sense of the lateness of the hour.

"All right. I must hunt your father up," Oakley rejoined with forced cheerfulness.

"And you won't tell him what I said to you?" Althea quavered, with a little thrill as of tears in her voice. All her courage had vanished before the imminence of the confession. "Nor even hint at it. I don't know what he would think."

They walked slowly up to the house, noting the highly piled masses of black clouds and guessing the nearness of the rain.

They separated at the veranda and Oakley, with beating heart, sought the library.

An hour later Reid and Oakley sat together in their common room, watching the murmurous downpour of the rain. After a long silence the former said:

"I've been thinking about you, Oak. Don't get mad at me for saying it, but you've got to look out."

"It's too late for your advice to do any good. I've done it already."

"Looked out! What! That child?"

"I know it. She isn't anything but a child, and that's what I like best about her, I think."

"Well, what luck? There's no need of asking, I suppose."

"Accepted by daughter and declined without thanks by father. Just about what you would expect."

"See here, Frank," Oakley added, breaking the pause that followed Reid's somewhat faltering congratulations, "I should like to have one person know just how it all happened. I know I seem like a cad in this whole business, but it really wasn't so bad as it seems." Then, very tenderly and delicately, he told the story of the night. If it had to be told at all it could not have been done better. Reid, however, listened with a sense of guilt. At the close of the narrative he said:

"And how was it left, if you don't mind telling?"

"She is going abroad for three years, and we are not to be engaged, nor to write. Then if we're both so minded we can be engaged until such a time as he graciously thinks us ready to marry."

"That sounds like Mr. Harding," Reid laughed. "And you agreed?"

"What else was there to do?" said Oakley wearily. "I wish I had fifty thousand dollars; that isn't much to ask for. But it wouldn't have

been bad fun, if it hadn't been a serious matter to me, to see the way Mr. Harding took hold of it. He was fazed for about three minutes and mad for about six more, and then he settled down to it just as if it had been a strike or a big business deal of some sort, and he struck out his campaign all in a minute, like the general he is. By the way, Reid, did you know he is at work on some sort of a book on Dante and his times? You should have heard him talk about it. I had fairly to break in with my small personal matters."

CHAPTER VIII

Theodore Harding was filled with dismay as he saw his friend gradually supplanting him. He had grown through a child's friendship and a boy's love to consider Margaret Favor his property. He had laid claim to her more than once, only to meet with deft evasions; but that summer had fixed his determination to have a definite answer. He waited long for his opportunity, however, as Margaret was wary, and not inclined to give him a chance for private speech. His heart was therefore filled with triumph one August afternoon, as he drove out into the country with the girl by his side. He spoke but little save to the horse, who worked his sensitive ears uneasily. The big fellow, trained to the saddle, chafed at the unusual trappings and the whir of light buggy wheels behind him. His glossy flanks were wet and he started nervously.

Once Margaret said, with a touch of petulance in her tone:

"I don't see what you are doing this for. It will spoil him for the saddle."

"There's no danger of that; he will always be a saddle horse first; but you see he doesn't get enough exercise, and I need a driving horse," Theodore explained.

"Economy?" said Margaret, laughing a little ironically.

They stabled the horse at the end of their drive and wound their way, alone with pasture and sky, into the pine wood, where big patches of golden light glowed on the smooth brown floor. The strident trill of insects seemed to be shut outside with the glare of sunshine. The only sound was the sighing of the wind among the pines and a ripple of water, growing momentarily louder as they proceeded.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Margaret said, in a voice full of the soft sincerity which marked her best mood. Theodore quickly recognized his opportunity, but fell suddenly tongue-tied, and could only answer:

"'Tis nice. It's a nice brook — hear it! Good trout-fishing in the pools above."

"I really believe, Theodore Harding, that all you care about out of doors is killing something." The girl spoke lightly, but there was an undercurrent of protest in her tones.

"Come now, Margaret, be fair," he answered. "Don't you ever do me a bit of justice?"

"Well, isn't that the way of it?"

"No, it isn't the killing at all. It's the sport. Someway, too, I like being out of doors better — just the air and the smell and the looks of everything — if I have a rod or a gun in my hands. I can't go out just for the exercise, the way some fellows do,— at any rate, I don't care so much about it."

"I can't understand how any one can be willing to kill wild creatures," said Margaret, in somewhat superior tones.

"Well, for all I'm such a butcher, I wouldn't be so unkind to anyone as you are to me, for a good deal," Theodore replied, turning the tables most unexpectedly.

"Oh, just look!" cried the girl, glad to change the subject. They had come to the spot where the brook made its way through the pines. The trees stood back a little from the stream, leaving a bank where hardy grass peeped up through the sprinkling of brown needles. The sunlight poured into the little opening and lighted up the water into clearest amber. The stream was broad and shallow, pouring over the stones of its bed with abundant laughter. Down to the

golden eddies crowded spikes of the cardinal flower, a glowing company, shining in the sunlight with the lambency of rubies. Over the narrow opening above, the sky stretched, an azure awning, flecked with one white, sunlit cloud, and down below, perched on a spray of alder which overhung the stream, was a blue-bird, child at once of earth and sky.

"I was reading an explanation of the fact — it was assumed as a fact —" Margaret began hastily. She knew what was coming and dreaded it.

"See here, Margaret, I've stood all the quibbling I can," Theodore said with a touch of the masterful in his tone altogether foreign to it. Then, seeing her flush, he added remorsefully, "I didn't mean to be a brute. You must forgive me, and recollect that I've stood being put off a good many times without saying much about it. Do you remember that I asked you something five years ago last December? I don't blame you for putting me off then. I was going the pace and wasn't fit for you. I'm not now, when it comes to that; but I've picked up a bit since then — and anyway, Margaret, you ought to know by this time whether you care for me or not." Theodore's dark cheeks were flushed, his whole face quivered with the in-

tensity of his feeling. Margaret was moved to pity, but not to decision. She spoke regretfully:

"I don't know, and that's all I can say. I do care for you, of course, how can I help it? But that way? We ought to love each other very, very much, Teddy, if we think of marriage,— more than people who have more tastes in common. We have that difference to get over all the time."

Theodore noticed the use of the old childish diminutive with an access of courage. In the days when she had used it habitually this matter had been settled in the affirmative. He spoke more hopefully:

"Well, let's talk it over. You say our tastes aren't alike. Just what do you mean?"

"Why, it is plain enough, I think. We don't care for the same things in literature or amusements or anything."

"Well, lots of people are married who don't, and they get on well enough."

"And is that all you aim at — getting on well enough?"

Something very rapturous had in truth been in Theodore's mind when he spoke the prosaic words, but he could not express it. He answered soberly:

"I wish I ever could suit you with what I say, Margaret. I'll say they are perfectly happy, if you prefer, only I don't believe in it. If you are waiting to find somebody you can be perfectly happy with you'll have to wait a good while."

"That's exactly the person I intend to wait for," Margaret replied with dignity.

"And that is what is keeping us apart!" said Theodore in desperation. "Margaret, dear, why should we expect to be perfectly happy? There will be troubles just the same, and days when one feels cross, and headaches, and all those things. This is the way I think of it — that I'll be happier with you than any one else."

"At any rate if you were the right person I ought to think I should be perfectly happy with you. I don't even feel sure that I should be happier with you than with any one else. If only we had more tastes in common," Margaret hesitated.

"I would try to like Browning and Ibsen and Wagner and all those fellows you are so fond of. Perhaps I could. And I would try so hard to make you happy. I'm not at all the brilliant sort of fellow you ought to marry, I know, but I would do the best I could. I know the things

you like and how to please you better than any other man does — and I would try harder."

"It seems selfish for me to be talking all the time of what would make me happy; but you know one of us couldn't be happy if the other wasn't," Margaret said gently.

"And you can't give me any answer then? You don't know how unsettling it is to me to go on this way."

"If I give you a definite answer now it must be no, Teddy. I don't want to say that."

"All right, don't say anything then. I can stand it a while longer. Only if you do decide, you might put an end to my suspense one way or the other without making me go all through this again. It gets monotonous."

He covered his real feeling with a mask of lightness which somehow jarred upon the woman at his side. She did not answer him, and in silence they turned and passed out through the dense shadows of the pines into the pasture. The shade from the wood reached long and dark ahead of them. Along the crest of the hill the cows went tinkling home, their bells sounding back softly through the evening air,— the one music which seemed to belong to the ferny pastures, the low sun and the August haze. Theodore looked longingly at Margaret as they

climbed the uncertain way together. From his position a little behind he could gaze unreproved at her flushed cheeks, her blue-grey eyes, her rippling bronze hair. She made a brilliant picture against the rusty background of the hill, with the sheaf of crimson flowers glowing against her creamy waist. She looked like some delicate garden blossom, strayed by chance into the wilds, yet not of them.

Theodore felt an almost unconquerable desire to capture his companion by force in some primitive fashion, and put an end to her useless questionings. They seemed, indeed, useless to him. To his mind it was an understood thing that a woman should have tastes and pleasures that a man did not share. Why should she feel it a more vital matter that he did not share her enthusiasm for Wagner than that laces and silks appealed but dimly to him? Why was it more to be deplored that he did not understand literary technique, than that she did not understand the philosophy of business relations? It was all a hopeless, hurting problem.

Two days later Margaret Favor and Francis Reid discussed the same question. They were drifting slowly down the river in the sunset. East, west and south glowed with a uniform, clear gold, curdled here and there into orange

flecks. In the north were piled great dark banks of clouds, touched on the edges with saffron, and lighted from coldness by the glow of the whole sky. Suddenly the color faded as if a great light had gone out. The clouds, robbed of their splendor seemed slaty and cold. Margaret shivered and drew her heavy blue cape more closely about her. Into the silence Reid quoted:

> "For note when evening shuts,
> A certain moment cuts
> The deed off, calls the glory from the grey."

Margaret joined him and chanted softly to the end.

"What does it make you think of?" she asked after a pause.

"The sunset? Of how life looked to me once and how it looks now, I think. It was all golden, but the gold faded and left the grey. It was like the sunset, too, in that it was no phenomenon, but just caused by the time o' day," he added with a little laugh.

Reid looked most ideally sad, as he gazed on the distant, sombre horizon. His high, black jersey somehow gave his face an ascetic look, the expression of the idealist, the devotee; but in his eyes was the pain of disillusion. The combination pleased Margaret, and she answered,

"I was thinking that same thing myself."

Reid had a lurking sense that the thought was after all an obvious one; but the mutual comprehension pleased him. It was an admirable opportunity for sentiment, and he quoted softly once more,

> "So one in thought and heart I trow
> That thou mightst press the strings and I might draw the bow."

There was a tiny spark of something like amusement in the girl's eyes as their glances met. She was strangely elusive, mingling a mocking hardness with her sentimental moods. The suspicion that she was laughing at him piqued Reid. He continued more boldly than usual:

"There speaks the final word on the subject of the perfect marriage."

His companion answered soberly enough now,

"Do you suppose it was really that to them?"

"Why not? In spite of illness and poverty those two were perfectly happy. I never doubt it."

"Theodore says there is no such thing as perfect happiness," Margaret ventured.

"The prosaic fellow! His imagination doesn't rise that high."

"Isn't he matter of fact? If I had asked him what the sunset made him think of he would have

said briefly, 'Cold tomorrow!'— and buttoned up his coat in preparation."

Reid laughed at her wicked little imitation, and then replied seriously,

"Well, he gains something. If he doesn't have the ecstasies he doesn't have the reactions. He probably gets more enjoyment in the long run. Which kind would you rather have?"

"I've always thought," said Margaret Favor slowly, "that if I could be perfectly happy for one week — and know it, I would rather have that than years of getting on 'well enough.'" She was thinking of Theodore's unlucky phrase. Reid could not know this, but he answered part of her thought.

"Yes, I believe in perfect happiness in marriage. Of course there are everyday troubles, but don't you know that on a day when you are keyed right to the world nothing troubles you much. The things that annoyed you before have lost their power to irritate. That is what the perfect marriage should do for one — put him in harmony with the universe."

"Do you think, Mr. Reid, that such harmony can come without likeness of tastes — that love alone is enough?" Margaret was a strange mingling of the sentimental girl and the woman

of the world, and was speaking now from the former mood.

"Perfect oneness can hardly come without essential harmony of tastes," said Reid judicially. "But it is something, after all, that cannot be analyzed."

"Any more than why one should love one person and dislike another," Margaret added.

"These things are too subtle for us. We blunder into them without knowing how or why. The main thing is not to accept any compromises at the hands of fate." He paused a moment and then added daringly.

"I have all the zeal of a new convert. I have always been more or less sceptical on the subject of affinities, and the perfect marriage, and all that. But lately I have come to believe that it is possible for a man to find a woman who is at once his complement and his supplement — sometimes it seems that the glory is coming back to the grey."

The girl met his significant gaze fully and answered with a short laugh,

"And I."

The charm of it all was that it might mean something or nothing, as they chose. Anything more outspoken, like Theodore's direct appeal, would have failed to kindle Margaret's imagina-

tion, or would have antagonized her. It was all plain common-sense, with the possibility, a sober drab at best, of getting on well enough. It had merely forced her toward a disagreeable decision. This, however, was a little intoxicating and in spite of its piquant excitement pledged nothing. Both knew that any serious talk of love between them was out of the question, and perhaps this very sense of the forbidden lent charm to the trifling. In the mind of the man, however, there was an uneasy sense of disloyalty to his friend.

Francis Reid was one of those men — not always loved over-much by their mates — who find in an attractive woman insistent and usually overpowering temptations to Platonic friendship. The idle, half-sentimental triflings do little harm anywhere, but sometimes, as in this case, they cast a more prosaic wooer into disfavor. Reid was a good fellow in the main, and a true friend to Theodore Harding, as the final issue always showed, and if he had thought that his friend stood a remote chance of winning Margaret, and with her, happiness, he would have avoided her society. As it was he drifted, smiling a trifle cynically over an attraction the power of which he owned.

CHAPTER IX

The case of Oakley and Althea grew no brighter as the autumn days shortened. The date approached on which Mrs. Harding and Althea were to sail for Europe, and, as time passed, Oakley began to realize the force of his feeling for the young girl. He appreciated, too, more keenly her dependence on him. His sense of honor had compelled him to forbid her the childish, pathetic notes and clandestine meetings on which she relied to sustain her spirits. He had been forced to be almost harsh with her, hard as he found it. He was, himself, absolutely dependent on outside support in time of trouble, and in this emergency relied on Theodore's unfailing sympathy. The latter forgot his own unrest in his friend's trouble and tried in every possible way consistent with his somewhat rigid ideas of propriety to console the disconsolate lovers. It was with the hope of modifying Oakley's gloom that he said in a casual way one morning,

"See here, Oak! Have you got time to take Victor out for a little exercise? He is spoiling for ten or twenty miles of road, and I don't like to have Tom ride him. He works the mischief with him some way or other."

"Are you sure you don't want him yourself?" Oakley asked apathetically.

"I can't get off. Shall be busy all day. It will be a real favor to me."

"I must go out to Cutler some day this week," Oakley replied. "Old Mrs. Mowbray wants to make a new will."

Theodore smiled appreciatively.

"Cutler will be just the thing for Victor. You want to look out for him a bit. He's feeling fine. Tom says he is ugly, but he isn't. The boy's afraid of him, that's all. What time shall I have him brought down?"

"Oh, two o'clock. But I can come up after him."

"I'll spare you the temptation. I'll telephone Tom to bring him down."

Oakley was familiar with Theodore Harding's powerful black horse and knew how to curb the creature's caprices almost as well as the owner. As he swung into the saddle that afternoon and felt the big beast beneath him quiver to be off, the exhilaration of riding took possession of him.

Victor was chafing to be in motion and took his smooth rapid gait along the road into the country. A bracing September breeze was blowing, tossing about the green boughs of the maples and revealing here and there a crimson leaf. The air, sharp with the tang of dying leaves, was a keen elixir of life; and gradually a part of the man's troubled personality was merged in the splendid gladness of the beast he rode. All but the greater troubles drop away from a good rider with a good horse beneath him. Oakley began to reflect that things might have been worse, and found the bright features of his position not few. By the time he reached Cutler he was in a frame of mind to listen patiently to his mother's old friend, soothe her doubts, and add another codicil to the lengthening document that formed her chief interest in life.

Althea Harding found some comfort for her forlorn state in the stables; and had been there when Tom, the groom, was saddling Victor. In answer to her questions she had learned that "Lawyer Oakley" was going to have the horse to ride out to Cutler. Althea's mind was made up in an instant. Fate had relented a little and had placed a meagre kindness in her path. As soon

as Tom was gone she saddled her little white mare and started in pursuit.

She pressed the horse at a brisk canter through the village and out into the country. She had always been cautioned against riding alone on remote roads, and had counted somewhat rashly on overtaking Oakley before she had left the thickly settled districts behind her. His pace had been swifter than she supposed and his start longer, however, and her pursuit was useless. Houses became less and less frequent and stretches of woodland longer. Vixen began to shirk. She had swift little mouse-colored legs, but had also strong ideas as to routes and distances. The girl, almost at the point of tears, plied the whip vigorously, but could only produce a gentle, ineffectual canter. She was still more than four miles from Cutler, and she realized with sudden fright that there were two roads thither. Oakley might return by a different way, and miss her altogether. Suddenly, by some inadvertence her whip became entangled in her riding skirt and was jerked from her hand.

She stopped the too willing Vixen in dismay, knowing that without brisk incentive the horse would go no further. She slid lightly to the ground and stooped to pick up the whip, grasping the bridle tightly. Vixen, however, seizing

the opportunity, freed herself with a dexterous toss of her head, and began cropping the wayside grass at a discreet distance.

With an angry exclamation Althea picked up the whip and followed the little mare. Vixen waited with lowered head, all meekness and submission, until she judged the hand too near. Then with a deftly calculated toss of the head she eluded Althea's grasp and edged away.

Thereon followed tiresome diplomatic tactics up and down the dusty road, Vixen seeming all deference, Althea angry and dismayed. Back and forth the wicked mare coquetted with her mistress, declining the choicest bait of grass and clover, but bent on obtaining for herself a satisfactory meal. Finally the girl sat down discouraged, upon a wayside stone, and left the horse to graze at a discreet distance.

Althea wiped her heated face disconsolately. She did not know the road well. She could not tell how far distant was the nearest house; her only hope lay in Marcus. If he came back that way he could catch the beast,— but if he should not? At the thought her courage gave way and she wept freely into her dust-begrimed handkerchief.

Suddenly as her grief and alarm were gathering force, the welcome rhythm of cantering hoofs

came to her ears, and the powerful pair, horse and rider, swept around the corner.

Oakley had dismounted in a moment, and was drying her tears with his arm about her. Matters were right, past questioning, by a sudden change. Even the obdurate Vixen, tired of freedom and recognizing a master, allowed herself to be caught without objection. Cheered by the presence of her customary companion, she even settled to her work bravely.

As soon as they were well under way, the bewildered Oakley asked for an explanation.

"How in the world do you happen to be out here alone, dear?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" she queried saucily, radiant with happiness. "Marcus, tell me honestly,— is my face dirty? I chased up and down the road so long in the dust that I feel horribly grubby."

"No, your face isn't dirty. It's clean enough to kiss. I only wish I could." Oakley reined in his horse toward her to be deftly eluded.

"You don't know how pretty you look, Althea," Oakley sighed from his enforced distance. "You ought always to be on horseback."

It was not wholly lover's prejudice that spoke there. Althea's flushed cheeks, her rings of curling hair, her happy eyes, made her face very

winsome, and her dainty figure swayed lightly with the motion of the horse. She colored still more as she felt her lover's admiring gaze fixed full upon her. But Oakley did not waste time in admiration when there was a mystery to be solved.

"How do you happen to be here? It's not fair of you not to tell me. Did you ever read a story of a knight rescuing a distressed maiden where she didn't tell him her adventures?" Oakley jested.

"I shall have to make them up, then. The truth is too humiliating. I followed you."

"Is that the truth or the made-up one?" he queried lightly.

"The truth. Isn't it humiliating enough?"

"It is rather rough to be following such a poor affair as I am, I will admit."

"Isn't it?"

"But how did you know I was coming out here? Did Teddy tell you?"

"Teddy! Teddy's a perfect clam. I was down in the stable when Tom was harnessing, and he told me."

"Althea, how do you feel about this sort of thing, anyway?" Oakley questioned gravely after a little pause. "Do you think it is square — honorable?"

"To tell the truth I haven't thought much about it. I only know that I shall die if I don't see you sometimes. I shall die, Marcus, I'm not joking, really die, I mean, if they take me off to Europe, thousands of miles away from you, where I can't see you for years. Please don't scold me. Don't you know that this is the last ride we shall have together — perhaps the last talk we shall have together? We sail four weeks from today, you know."

Nevertheless, after a moment, Althea set her face brightly forward, determined to make the most of those few last minutes. The two rode side by side, chatting of foolish, personal things, fraught to them with the deepest significance. There was little enough of brightness in the category. The one ray of light in the attitude of their whole world toward their love was that thrown by Theodore's blunt sympathy; and on this they dwelt, letting the more discouraging aspects of the case drop out of sight. It was a pathetic postponement of the inevitable, a smiling pretence at mirth that was almost sadder than tears.

They rode on through the lengthening shadows of the golden afternoon. Suddenly they came to a long, wooded ascent, dark with hemlock. Only two miles remained to be traversed

before the outskirts of Underhill should be reached and the stolen moment should be over. As they entered the belt of shade and slackened their pace for the long climb, Oakley was saying,

"So all there is to do is to be patient, little girl."

The empty pretence was over of a sudden for Althea. She reached out one gloved hand to him with a gesture half-appealing, half-impatient.

"Patient! I hate being patient. When I want things I want them now."

"Yes, dear, but if you can't have them?"

"I always have had them until this. And I'm not sure that we can't have this — if you really want it, Marcus. I don't believe you want to be engaged and have me stay at home from Europe."

"Now, Althea!" said Marcus, bringing the willing Victor to a halt, "We've got to have this thing settled once for all. I love you and I always shall. I never loved a woman before and I never shall again. You are the one who will have to change if either of us does. You are young, younger than your real age in some things. You are not old enough to know your own mind in a matter of this sort. I agree with your father that you shouldn't enter into a long engagement."

"This needn't be a very long one unless you say so," she answered shyly. "Father has money enough for us all. He might offer to help us out a little, I think." Althea had brooded on this matter until it seemed a very palpable grievance.

"He is too much of a gentleman to offer me money," said Oakley hotly. "You know I couldn't live on your father, Althea."

"Well, I didn't mean exactly that," Althea explained. "But you could have a chance in the business. Think of the help you could be to father, with all the law you know. You could make money faster there. Don't you see? And then father will be more in favor of you. Don't you think he will?"

The daring of her suggestion stunned Oakley. In his vain canvassing of ways and means, the possibility of giving up his profession had never occurred to him. Finally he voiced his thought in astonishment.

"Do you mean, Althea, that you want me to give up my profession, that I've worked for and denied myself for all these years?"

"It isn't a question of what I want, but of what you want. If you care for me as much as you say you do you will be glad to make some sacrifice for the sake of making me happy."

Oakley suspected, for one moment of vision, a littleness of nature in Althea at which he had never guessed before. He was hurt and angry and amazed.

"If you cared for me as much as you say you do, you would never suggest such a sacrifice," he said bitterly.

"I don't see that it is such a sacrifice. Instead of struggling along for years to make a bare living, you are sure of that at the start and plenty of money in the future. Then we could be engaged, and I needn't go away — don't you see? You would have all the things you are working for, without waiting."

"If you think the money in my profession is all the thing I chose it for, it is no use for me to try to explain. But when you talk about my unwillingness to make sacrifices you are unfair."

"Aren't you proving it now, I should like to know?" Althea reiterated. She was waging her first battle with her lover. In the formality of their intercourse up to the time of their engagement, and in their subsequent separation, there had been little chance for differences of opinion. The girl did not know what she could effect against Oakley's firm tenderness. But on this matter her heart was set. She was a person of one idea, of one emotion, not well-balanced, per-

haps, but steadfast in her determination to gain the end she had in view. She had thought out her plan through sleepless nights; and she felt sure that it was feasible and the one solution of the tangle. She was sure that she asked but little: simply to be spared the long voyage, the absence. It all depended on Oakley's acquiescence, and she saw that failing her.

"I'm not proving my unwillingness to make sacrifices for you," Oakley's voice broke in upon her thoughts,—"I hope I'm proving that I'm a man, that's all. Can't you understand me, dear? You can't, or you wouldn't ask me even to think of such a thing. Don't you see, I should be dishonored in the sight of the whole world, myself most of all, if I did such a thing? Do you think your father would respect me any more for it? That would be the last thing for me to do if I wished to gain his liking. Your father likes men who can do things, not men who hang on other people."

"But you might consider me! Don't you care anything for my happiness?" Althea reiterated a little sharply.

"You know I do, Althea. More than for anything else in the world, even perhaps than my profession. I can't make it clear to you, can I, how I feel about that? But anyway, dearest,

it wouldn't be for your happiness if I gave up my profession. I should make a poor business man. My heart wouldn't be in the work. Your father would have to drag me along for your sake. But in the law, Althea, I can do something, some day, that you will be proud of."

"I would rather be happy with you than proud about you," Althea murmured pitifully.

"But don't you see it isn't a question of what either you or I would rather, dear little girl? It's a question of what has got to be. I chose my profession years ago, before I even knew you, and it's too late to change. You will have to love my profession along with me, and perhaps you will come to think it the best part of me. Don't suppose the thought of having you right within sight and speech doesn't tempt me."

He stopped abruptly. Althea's face was set hard ahead. Her lips were tightly closed. They were riding through the valley now and any display of feeling was out of the question. So they crossed the bridge and climbed the hill in silence. They cantered down the drive without another word, and when they reached the stable Althea slid from her horse before Oakley could help her. She turned without speaking and ran swiftly through the stable and into the house. He could not see that she was weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER X

Mr. Harding relented at none of Althea's pleadings nor Oakley's arguments. He had decided that his daughter must go abroad and he saw no reason for changing his mind. He accompanied his wife and Althea on the first stage of their journey, though he had an injured sense that they were but poor company. Mrs. Harding was, in fact, already grieving for her husband, her son, and her home. Althea yielded the outward forms of obedience but was inwardly defiant. Her heavy eyes bore the marks of long weeping, her dark cheeks were pale, all her elusive claim to beauty had vanished.

Her father noted these things anxiously. His mind, nevertheless, continually wandered from the perplexing problem which his daughter had furnished him to others yet unsolved. For fifteen years he had been working toward the consolidation of certain business interests involving

a national control of his industry. Here he had bought a factory entire, there he had merely gained a controlling interest, in another place he had converted to his far-reaching views some man of mark. As yet, however, even in the circle of his own business, his power was unrecognized. He had waited through all the changes which came to the business of the country. He had been sanguine when others were discouraged, cautious when others were most hopeful. He had seen a score or more of combinations in the trade rise and flourish and fall apart, and still he had judged the time not ripe, willing that others should experiment in his place. There had been something almost superhuman in his patience, in his absolute certainty of unlimited time for his work. And now the years of patient waiting were at last to be rewarded.

The leading representatives of the trade were already assembled in New York to discuss terms of union. These men were aiming at a combination of combines. Many somewhat amorphous organizations, as well as several firmly incorporated bodies, would be included if the plans succeeded. There was nothing new in their scheme, in fact the path had been marked out for them by more than one big organization.

Mr. Harding had now, however, little doubt

of success. He knew, past doubting, that the time had come for which he had waited so bravely. His corner of the industrial world was ready for the big combination. It needed, more than ever before, the force of the upright example which he was determined to set for it. He did not doubt, and yet, as the ultimate struggle which was to test his years of waiting drew near, he trembled. He had staked so much upon it.

The weary round of shopping went on for the languid and indifferent travellers. Meanwhile Mr. Harding was closeted in endless conferences. The wrangles, the agreements, the stipulations, with which the common-place hotel room echoed were never divulged outside. But nightly Mr. Harding emerged from the conclave pale and irritable, tried beyond endurance by the strain of bending almost to the breaking point; and nightly he told himself that he was a little nearer the end he sought. He felt uneasily that here and there he was giving way where perfect integrity would have stood firm. To his conscience, he justified himself by the thought of what his aim really was. When he took his way back to Underhill he felt that in the main he had kept his honor unspotted in a trying crisis.

Nevertheless he prepared to meet his colleagues of the Underhill pool with nervousness.

No one would have guessed, however, that his mind was not at rest as he entered the library that rainy October afternoon. Even in the midst of his anxiety, he noted with approval the cheerful contrast which the deep red of the walls, the glow of the bindings, and the crackling of the wood fire, made with the wind and rain and the downward flutter of pale leaves. He joined in the conversation with seeming unconcern, letting it drift as it would. Mr. Ordway was the last to arrive, and as they waited for his coming his colleagues discussed him.

"He's as stubborn as a mule and mistakes his obstinacy for conscience," said Burnham with a short laugh.

"I think Mr. Ordway confounds private and business morality," Mr. Harding said.

"You are making dangerous distinctions," said Albert Evans, a thin, nervous man who spent most of his time untangling the chain of his eye-glasses.

"I think only necessary ones," Mr. Harding replied serenely. "For example, I might kill a man in battle, but I should certainly hesitate to shoot one down in cold blood. If you stop to think of it, business is a highly diversified kind of war, and some things are justified by that very fact."

"You've hit it, Harding!" Burnham said enthusiastically. "Business isn't business unless it's a case of every one for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

"It's a harsh way to put it, but I'm afraid that it is only too near the truth. And we have competition to blame for the most of it."

Mr. Harding listened restlessly. He was too tired and worn for the struggle which he felt impending. Yet with his customary eagerness for action and joy in conflict he longed to attack the foe. So, as soon as he had skilfully brought the conversation around to the point, he told his companions briefly of the meeting in New York and the opportunity which was in their hands. He managed tactfully to make it seem right that he should have left them in ignorance of the projected deal until it was almost an accomplished fact. He painted the enterprise in glowing colors.

There was the momentary tribute of absolute silence, then an indrawn breath. But hardly heeding these signs of interest and excitement Mr. Harding plunged into a rapid, terse and systematic exposition of facts and figures. He even touched lightly on the moral force that a combine rightly administered might become. His hearers listened in perfect silence. The magnitude of the plan checked all comment for the moment.

They were busy following the skilful manipulation of facts and figures. Burnham was the first to break the stillness.

"It's got to be done," he said heartily. "Anything that we can do to make it a go we will do. It's the time now to lay aside any little personal feelings; we must all pull together."

The faces of most of those present were free from doubt, full of elation. But Mr. Harding could see that Ordway, Evans and Theodore were unmoved. Evans' lips were already open to speak.

"As near as I can make out a man loses his initiative entirely. His business exists only as a form, a name."

"He is represented by the board of directors which he helps elect," a voice retorted.

"We do not speak of an American citizen as lacking liberty even though he has delegated his individual authority as ruler to a representative," Mr. Harding added suavely.

"This isn't a time to go by analogies. The truth of it is, a man gives up his chance to organize, to direct personally, when he becomes part of a big combination."

"But he gains in proportion. Think of not being affected by a bad year or by individual

losses only in so far as they affect the sum total of gains."

"But you are not affected by the gains of your business except in the same remote way. Half the sport is gone."

"Sentiment! Sentiment!" said Burnham hastily. "Money is what we go into business for, if I know anything about it."

"Have you any idea what the capitalization of the company would be?" Evans inquired in the pause that followed.

"I have not the exact figures for the different companies" — Mr. Harding hesitated.

"Never mind them, they wouldn't bear much proportion to the real capital behind the company," sneered Evans.

Mr. Harding met the issue fairly.

"Why do you assume from the outset that the corporation will be over-capitalized? for I suppose that is what you mean," he rejoined. "The resources which this projected corporation can muster in time of need are practically unlimited. There would be little point in issuing and paying dividends on stock in excess of the actual capitalization when the projectors could control directly and indirectly far more than they need."

Mr. Harding's tones were reproachful. It appealed to him as a personal grievance that these

men should oppose his carefully thought out scheme. He felt that he had a right to complain of their slowness to kindle with the great idea. He forgot for a moment that he had not done this for them alone, that he could not have helped doing it if he had tried, that the conception toward which he had been working had become second nature with him. Every objection to his plan seemed like a personal affront. So he looked up sharply, almost angrily, when Ordway's rough voice broke the silence.

"It don't make much difference what I think," he said quietly, "an' I wa'n't never one that could speak in meetin'. I don't expect to make anybody think as I do, but I've watched the way the things are run the country over, an' I've seen time and agin that they put down the price of raw material an' drove firms that wa'n't inside out of the business, an' put up sellin' prices, an' I don't recollect seein' any of 'em puttin' up wages. All I've got to say is I may be all off, but I don't want nothin' to do with 'em"; and he fell suddenly silent, shaking his head gloomily.

Evans spoke almost as soon as Ordway's voice died away. His thin, nervous face was flushed.

"I must say that I agree entirely with Mr. Ordway. If the corporation could be capitalized at the mere value of its assets, if it could pay a

fair price for raw material and sell the product at a fair market rate, it would be another matter altogether."

"What would be the use of combining, then?" questioned Burnham coolly. "There ain't goin' to be saving enough from the coöperation to make it worth while." Mr. Harding coquetted with motives and named them euphemistically; Burnham delighted in laying bare unsparingly the basest springs of action.

"Well, then the question is," retorted Evans eagerly, "do any of us want to go in for a thing of that sort? We say that the state of business drives us to it. Wouldn't it be better to retrench, to go slowly and carefully, waiting for better times? And another point is —." He stammered, his habitual hesitation returning suddenly.

Albion Harding was guilty at this point of a strange breach of manners, but the look of uncertainty and indecision on several faces decided him. He caught the critical moment and said sharply, while Evans was vainly searching for the broken thread of his thought:

"Of course you all realize that our decision will make no difference in the formation of the combine. The only difference will be that in one case our little pool will be inside, on the best of

terms, in the other it will be outside, fighting comparatively alone a force of millions."

The general had vanquished the opposing force by simply knowing the critical moment and seizing it. One of his adversaries, at least, recognized the defeat. Evans rose abruptly.

"I may as well go," he said, with a volume of quiet rage and scorn in his voice. "I shall certainly be out of place in the high pure air of the Missionary Monopoly. Its altruistic atmosphere is too rare for me."

He stood with his hand upon the door, looking expectantly at Mr. Ordway.

"No, I ain't goin'," the latter answered the unspoken question. "I'm goin' to stay and vote against it. It will do me a heap of good if it don't amount to anything."

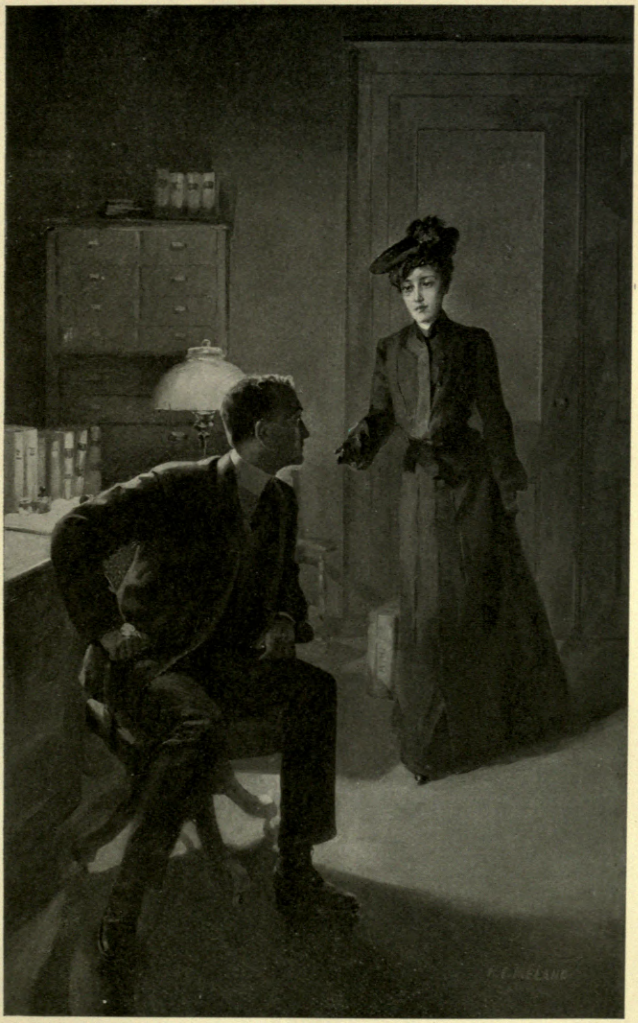
Evans turned petulantly and opened the door with a look to Theodore for support; but the latter sat with downcast eyes. In the pause Burnham said significantly:

"I suppose you realize, Evans, that if the 'Missionary Monopoly' decides to squeeze it can squeeze hard."

CHAPTER XI

The same evening which saw Mr. Harding trying to forget his loneliness in the first taste of triumph saw Oakley in a far different mood. Althea had gone, for years it might be, and had left him in anger. She had not been able to see that he could not honorably give up his profession for the chance of speedy advancement in business. She had been unable to realize that Oakley's fears on her account were not misgivings on his own. They had parted in anger and the years to come held unlimited possibilities for sorrow. Amid all his forebodings he never doubted Althea's love for him, but those last words of hers —" I shall die, Marcus, really die, I mean —," echoed gloomily in his ears.

All day he had tried vainly to read; but all day a passionate, pleading face, with big black eyes softened by tears, and dusky cheeks with faint, soft hollows, fairer than roundness, had grown



out of the blurred page before him. The incessant dash of rain and moan of wind had worn upon his nerves, and he paced the room uneasily, his whole splendid strength chafing over his weakness. At length he sank drearily into his chair, rested his head upon his arms and fell asleep.

He slept for a long time. The rain fell less violently, the wind rose higher and higher, the stars began to peep out fitfully only to be quenched again. The sounds of the street died away. At length the eleven o'clock train came shrieking in and passed out again, and still Oakley slept on. Suddenly a door opened softly. He woke with a start, and turned, hardly able to believe his eyes,— Althea stood before him.

The lamp was burning low, but he could note the glistening tendrils of hair about her face, the dainty trimness of her travelling suit. There was a look half of fear, half of pleading in her eyes. It seemed to him that her face was even thinner than when he had seen her last. All these things came to him like a flash as he gazed at her intently, assuring himself that she was not a dream. She added to this doubt by her silence, but at length she spoke one little trembling word:

"Marcus!"

"Althea, is it you? I thought I was dream-

ing; but you are flesh and blood. You *are,* dearest. I can't be dreaming this and this. No, your hair and face are all wet from the storm,—that can't be a dream. What are you crying about, Althea? There's nothing to cry about, now we are together again." Oakley had lost sight of everything but the present.

"Then you are not angry with me, dear? How good you are," Althea quavered.

"Angry? Why should I be? I thought you were angry with me."

"You had a perfect right to be. I was a horrid little beast the last time I saw you."

"I won't listen to such talk. Tell me where you came from? Did you come down on a moonbeam?" A strange lightness of heart possessed him.

"No, I came by train from New York," Althea answered practically.

"And your mother? I thought you sailed today," he questioned.

"I left her in New York," said Althea simply. "I just couldn't stand it. I'm not a child to be made to do things this way. I'm willing not to be engaged to you. I can stand it if I don't speak to you, but I've got to see you now and then, just a glance. I must hear your name now and then or I shall die. I'm not just talking,

Marcus. Just feel my arm, if you don't believe it. I can't sleep and I can't eat. It's killing me, dear."

"Poor little, thin arm!" said Oakley, kissing the rough cloth of her sleeve. "You are right, Althea. It isn't fair. You are a woman after all — even if you are a child. They ought not to try to dictate to you like this. Of course we must do as your father says," he added weakly, "within reason. But I don't think this comes under that head."

They were sitting side by side on the leather couch, talking, half with broken words, half with silence. Oakley was yet in a dream world, in the state of half-doubting acceptance of joy to which he had wakened. He hardly dared to grasp his new happiness closely lest it should elude him. Althea spoke on in little broken phrases.

"You see I didn't mean to come here so, but I looked up when I was opposite the office and saw your shadow on the shade. You poor, dear boy, you looked so tired and forlorn with your head on your arm! I couldn't help it. I just turned and walked in. Mother will think it very dreadful, won't she?"

"I suppose it isn't a very conventional thing to do. Still it's not so very late. You mustn't

stop. But wouldn't I like to keep you for always!"

"I call half-past eleven pretty late, and I am afraid father will," said Althea soberly.

"Why, it's not half-past eleven! What train did you come in on, anyway?" Oakley cried in astonishment.

"The eleven o'clock train. It must be half-past now."

Oakley whistled softly and miserably through closed teeth.

"Good Lord! I didn't think it was more than nine. I might have known. It must have been that when I fell asleep. It's to be hoped nobody saw you come in here, little girl."

"I met someone in the hall just as I had my hand on the knob. I should have turned and run then, if I had dared," Althea faltered. "But I just dodged in. Perhaps he didn't recognize me."

Oakley was silent. He knew that all the chances were against Althea Harding's having entered his room unrecognized. The daughter of the wealthy mill-owner was not an obscure person in a little city like Underhill. Oakley knew, moreover, that the tongues of their native town had already coupled their names together in friendly comment. He felt instinctively that

her presence in the Archer building would be town talk in a week, and that the remarks this time could not be friendly. In a flash he pictured Mr. Harding's white-hot anger when the rumor should come to his ears. Oakley realized in an instant whither events were hurrying them. He did not stop to question whether it would not be better to run the chance of Althea's recognition than to link her life to his poverty. If he had stopped to think the result would probably have been the same; but in this emergency he cast reason aside. A fierce, passionate sense of the necessity of sight and touch of her filled his mind, and he was swept off his feet by the rush of emotion. The temptation had come to him in the guise of a necessity and he knew that instead of being sorry or afraid he was glad.

Something in the silence, short though it was, alarmed the girl. The clasp of her lover's arm had a certain electric quality. Her breath came quickly and she feared she knew not what. She began to justify herself brokenly.

"I know I ought not to have come, but somehow I couldn't help it, when I saw you alone and lonely. Perhaps he didn't know who I was, but I'm afraid father will hear about it. What will he ever say? I must go, Marcus, but I'm afraid, — so afraid!"

She tried to disengage herself from his arm but he would not free her.

"There is another way, Althea," he said very gently. "Don't you know what I mean? Marry me tonight, dear. Then nobody can say anything about it. Nobody can separate us any more then. Your father cannot claim control over my wife."

He was looking down at her with glowing eyes, but she did not meet his gaze. His face, lowered to hers, touched only her damp hair.

"Tonight?" was all she said. "Oh, I can't, I can't!"

"Do you want to go all through this again? I can't stand it, that's all there is about it. Stop and think, Althea, if your father is likely to give up the thing that he has set his heart on because you have disobeyed him. Is he?"

"No, he isn't. It's all well enough to say he can't make me go without using force, but he can, and I know it." A sob stopped her speech.

"But don't you see that he can't if you are my wife? Think what it will mean not to be separated again." The sides of the argument were reversed and Oakley was pleading with all the eloquence at his command for that which he had opposed but a few days ago.

"Yes, but remember all the things you have

said. I'm not thinking about myself now. I don't care about anything as much as being with you. But I shall be a drag on you. I'm not the sort of girl you ought to marry."

"You are the only one I shall ever marry. I don't want to force you, Althea, for I realize how little I have to offer you, but you understand all that. I'm afraid you don't understand, dearest, — the unkind things that will be said about us if you were recognized. I'm not thinking of myself — I can stand it. But it means a great deal to a woman. I want you to see both sides."

A burning flush rose to her hair.

"Don't, Marcus!" she cried, shrinking from him. "Oh, I don't know what made me do it! I seemed to be drawn here."

"You were drawn here," Oakley said tenderly. "Fate was too strong for us. We have proved that we can't live apart, now we will try life together."

"It isn't fair, Marcus, for you to suffer because of my rashness. It's all my fault, and I should always have myself to blame if we were not happy."

"How can we help being happy? I'm not afraid. But we must decide at once. Every moment we delay makes it harder to go home."

They contended lovingly for a few moments

more, Oakley vanquishing the girl's weakening arguments one after the other. At length he wrested from her a doubtful consent and hurried away to engage a carriage for their midnight ride into the neighboring state. Althea sat in the straight-backed office-chair with her hands tightly clasped in her lap. She had the feeling of one entrapped in some snare, and in this crucial moment she saw, with a lightning flash of insight, her own imperfections, Oakley's weakness, and the sacrifices that would be necessary for both. There was no escape! And yet — Suppose she went away now, anywhere, out of his life, away from the possibility of bringing any trouble upon him? That was the only solution of the problem. She did not consider that her flight would only confirm the gossip that she might have aroused, she did not ask herself definitely what would become of her. In the background of her thought was the consciousness that Theodore was both loyal and silent. With this sole reliance she reached the greatest height of unselfishness of which she was capable. Without one calculating thought for herself she laid aside her future for her lover's.

The lamp had gone out and she was forced to grope blindly for her bag and umbrella. She stumbled, crying bitterly, to the door and passed

down the echoing, midnight stairs. For a moment she stood uncertain as to her course,— upstreet or down were much the same to her. As she hesitated, the soft whirr of wheels struck upon her ears, and a light buggy drew up before the building.

"All ready and waiting?" said Oakley softly, and in a moment the girl was seated beside him and they were off.

The clouds were torn and ragged, riding high and swift. Streaming along, they left little openings, here for a winking star, there for the high October moon. The road ahead gleamed pale gold as the waning moon shone out, then darkened into a dull unison with the bordering shadows. A cold wind blew in fitful gusts out of the north and rained pallid maple leaves upon the street. There was no sound save the rush of wind in the tree-tops and the light beat of the horse's hoofs. On either side were the sleeping people of the sleeping city. It almost seemed that these two of all the world were awake, and troubled, and yet alive in every nerve with a fearful happiness.

As they reached the summit of East Hill Althea turned and looked back. The river gleamed cold between the crowding factories; beyond, on the top of the opposite hill, lay her father's house,

rambling, dusky and indistinct, save for the glowing windows of the eastern wing. The girl knew that her father was pouring out weariness or trouble on his organ; and she knew, moreover, with a sudden clarity of insight, what this thing would mean to his love for her, to his high pride in the family name. She had seen before only that he was imperious, arbitrary; now she realized that he had been willing to deny himself much for her good.

With a throb of unavailing remorse she leaned her head against Oakley's shoulder. It was all a pathetic, impenetrable tangle, in which nothing in the world seemed sure. She almost doubted her own identity. An hour before she had been Althea Harding, in open rebellion, desperately unhappy, but still unchanged. Now she was approaching, almost without preparation, the most solemn moment of her life, reluctant, afraid, ashamed, with a woman's fears and regrets. Oakley, even, seemed strange and alien, and she gained no comfort from his presence. So with the beat of rapid hoofs in their ears, the moon now darkened, now gleaming overhead, and the strange carpet of fallen leaves under foot, they sped on over the country road.

CHAPTER XII

If Marcus Oakley and his bride had wished to make a sensation they would have been disappointed. Underhill talked, to be sure, but in a baffled fashion utterly puzzled by Mr. Harding's attitude. It could not know of the storm of anger which had burst on Reid's unprotected head when, in accordance with Oakley's midnight command, he had broken the news to Mr. Harding. It could not know of all the dull foreboding and deep disgust that the whole matter caused the calm man who moved about so serenely among them.

A keen dread of publicity, a shrinking from the vulgar melodrama of any open rupture with his daughter, a genuine and deep love for his child, and a sense of his own responsibility for this final step, had together prompted his course of toleration. He had thought the puzzle out courageously, not sparing himself, and had de-

termined to bear this trouble as philosophically as possible.

The situation had in his eyes, however, one mitigating feature — separation from his wife would be no longer necessary. He had fancied sensitively that she was eager for the trip, or, at least, resigned to its necessity, and therefore he had concealed and sought to ignore his own dread of her absence. The first cloud of their married life had thus hung over the last three weeks before the parting — a cloud which Mrs. Harding had dissipated with a word. In the midst of her grief over her daughter's rash act she had said, with her shy, girlish smile suddenly dawning:

"It seemed to me sometimes that I could never bear to be gone so long from you. I was almost as homesick as Althea, and I might have run away if she had not."

"Why, I thought you wanted to go abroad. You never let me guess. Why didn't you tell me, Evelyn, that you felt like that?" he had retorted in surprise.

"I was under orders from my commander-in-chief," she answered softly. "It wasn't my place to question."

As he kissed his wife, Mr. Harding realized as never before the rarity of their love. A cer-

tain, serene content filled his mind in the midst of his disappointment and foreboding regarding Althea's future.

This feeling of relief and renewed joy in each other's society helped along a somewhat irksome winter. The little family missed Althea sorely. There was a certain awkwardness in their newly adjusted relations with her. The hands stretched so resolutely across the gulf met but strangely. The relations between Theodore and his father were also strained. On the first of December Mr. Harding had returned complacently from New York, and at the same date the papers all over the country had blossomed into head-lines which told of the projected formation of a great combine, and hinted that the presidency would not fall outside of Underhill. This news had served to widen the breach between father and son. Theodore had not allowed himself to comment on this action, but his unspoken criticism galled Mr. Harding no less than frankness would have done. He knew that his son disapproved, that the painful explanation was only postponed; and he awaited it with mingled dread and impatience.

The father sat alone in his office one afternoon in late December. A little fire glowed in the grate and lighted up his snowy hair and keen,

thoughtful face. Even this soft, uncertain light brought out tense lines about the firm mouth. Mr. Harding was apparently thinking deeply, though his whole attitude was relaxed and restful, except for one slender forefinger which beat thoughtfully upon the arm of his chair. By and by he seemed to wake from his reverie with a start as the outer door of the office closed sharply, and quick, eager steps crossed the room. He looked up as his son entered, feeling somehow that the silence of their estrangement was at an end.

During the whole autumn Theodore had drawn into himself in dismay and disapproval, fighting out the question of right and expediency. He had ridden far out into the bleak country that afternoon, and there had come to his decision. In a hard-fought battle he had come off victor. On one side was his whole soul's passionate protest against his father's scheming,— a protest not perhaps grounded on a logical thinking out of the whole question, but none the less vehement on that account. To balance it, was his eager craving for his father's approval and sympathy, his dread of wounding his mother's love for them both, his knowledge that he was casting aside his chance of winning Margaret Favor. This last, the most purely selfish of the motives, he

found hardest to combat. He knew Margaret's ambition, and knew that Theodore Harding, obscure and at odds with his father, with no foothold in the business world, would have little chance with her. Nevertheless, he argued with quaint, mathematical philosophy that one's chances could not well be less than nothing. So his prejudice against the trust, balanced against his father, his mother and his sweetheart, had outweighed them all. He had come back from his ride warmed and exhilarated, with that fleeting uplift of spirits that comes from a quickened circulation and a hard-won decision, and had hastened to Mr. Harding.

"Are you busy, father?" he asked as soon as he entered the room. "If you aren't I'd like half an hour with you."

"I am at your service until dinner time."

"Then suppose we talk over our affairs. I want to see if we can come to an agreement — about some other arrangements — I mean for myself."

Mr. Harding grasped the significance of his son's broken words.

"You mean that you wish to withdraw your money from the business?"

"I don't want to do it, but I don't see any other way," Theodore replied reluctantly.

"You are making mountains out of mole-hills, Theodore. You are letting the most quixotic of scruples stand in your way," his father answered a trifle shortly.

"I don't see it in that way, father. There's nothing quixotic at all about my stand. At any rate I have good backing."

"The backing of theorists — the practical men are all for combination. I wish, Theodore, that you would let me judge for you in this matter. I have looked into it far more thoroughly than you have. You are at the mercy of one side."

"I am old enough to judge these things for myself. You don't realize that I am a man of twenty-eight, do you? I can't be dictated to in anything so important as this."

Theodore had chosen an unfortunate word. His father answered coldly:

"I am not aware that I am in the habit of trying to dictate to you in any matters, important or otherwise, Theodore. I only wished you to be sure you had decided before you made so vital a change as this. Do you realize that if you sever your connection with me, and so with the combine, all your apprenticeship of years will go for nothing — that you will be without business prospects?"

"I don't know. It's not likely that your cor-

poration will control the entire trade. I shall have some money to invest and a good deal of experience."

"It is not impossible that the American may control the entire field. It is worth your consideration." Mr. Harding's tones were cold.

"Then I suppose I can make my way somewhere else. Other people, older and of no more ability, have done so before now."

"I wish you would listen to me, Theodore," Mr. Harding reiterated patiently. "You are about to make a grave mistake,— and all for a fancy. You will find, if you will only wait, that the American is conducted as honestly as any business firm can be. I acknowledge that trusts have done more or less to gain their unenviable reputation. But their mistakes can be avoided. There is nothing inherent in their character to make these false steps necessary. I — we intend that our measures and our profits shall both be legitimate."

"I heard today that you were over-capitalized at the start."

Mr. Harding hesitated. He would not lie directly, but he would give a false impression.

"Even if that were true — I don't see that it is a criminal charge."

"No, but you have often claimed that over-

capitalization is one of the causes of the disgraceful affairs trusts are always getting into."

Mr. Harding retorted on another line of argument.

"There's no good in going over this ground again and again," he said wearily. "It is plain we can never agree. My word to you that this corporation will be run honorably, or not at all, seems to count for nothing."

"Forgive me, father, but you overestimate your strength. It isn't in one man to hold a great body like that," Theodore's tone was respectful, but the mere fact that he ventured to express himself thus was sufficient to incur Mr. Harding's displeasure. He was determined to be patient, however, and continued pacifically:

"But I have backing. I'm not alone. And if I overestimate my power, as you so considerately point out, you overestimate the power of the combine. You make a great, awful abstraction out of it, a sort of juggernaut, and then if you don't precisely worship, you venerate. I heartily pity you if you let your superstitious fears influence you to give up your business prospects. But I have said all that I can, and if you still persist you must go your way; but you are ruining yourself."

"I can't help it, it has got to be, then," Theodore rejoined doggedly.

"Have you consulted Miss Favor in regard to this move?" Mr. Harding asked. He saw another cherished plan in jeopardy. Margaret was his choice for a daughter-in-law.

"No, I haven't," Theodore replied brusquely. "She has given me no right to ask her opinion on any matter connected with myself."

"You realize, I suppose, that your prospects must, of course, affect the way in which she regards you. She is eminently sane and clear-headed."

Theodore nodded without speaking. His lips were firmly set, his clear eyes were sombre. This resolution had already cost him much, and he thought he realized its full gravity. He could not now be moved. Mr. Harding knew his son well enough to see that his stand was firmly taken, that argument and entreaty would be alike useless, so he said gently:

"I don't wish to dictate to you or try to influence you unduly in a matter of conscience, Theodore. You have doubtless considered the question well, and, let me assure you, I appreciate your sincerity if I cannot your method of reasoning. There is, however, hardly time to go into business details before dinner."

Albion Harding looked at his thin gold watch thoughtfully. The little time-piece had been his mother's and he still wound it patiently with a key each night, when most other men would have laid it aside for one more modern and convenient. As he studied its face, he thought that this sudden demand on Theodore's part came at an embarrassing time, when his large fortune was so closely tied up in the affairs of the American. He did not, however, let this trouble him. He knew that his credit was practically unlimited. He went on speaking after a moment's silence.

"I don't need to say again, do I, how much I regret this? I shall miss you everywhere in the practical details of the business. I have thought sometimes that you might fancy that Mr. Reid had taken your place with me. I think you have realized, however, that he only took a side of the business distasteful to you, and left your time free for the details in which you excel. I shall hardly know how to get along without you, and I know that I shall find it impossible to fill your place. But I want you to understand that, hard as I find it to appreciate your standpoint, I do not blame you." Mr. Harding prided himself on his breadth of view, his ability to enter into the feelings of all men.

The two sat in silence in the fire-lit room.

Theodore was touched by his father's kindness. He could not speak. At last Mr. Harding broke the stillness once more.

"I hope any new schemes of yours won't call you away from Underhill, Theodore. Your mother and I cannot get along without you, especially since we have lost Althea. We must keep one of our children with us."

"I'm sure I hope I shan't have to go away, father," Theodore replied heartily. "You have been very good to me about this business and I shall always appreciate it."

Truth to tell, the two men were nearer at that moment than they had been for many a day. Theodore was deeply touched by his father's forbearance, and by the delayed acknowledgment of what he had labored so hard to accomplish with so little apparent result. The thought that he had really succeeded in being of vital use to his father made the parting yet harder. He felt aimless and adrift and lonely at the prospect of relinquishing the business to which he had been reared. But even in this depression, the new comradeship with his father comforted him. If this step of his had brought them closer together it seemed that nothing could effectually separate them.

CHAPTER XIII

Theodore Harding led an aimless and unhappy life that winter. He had not been used to idleness of late and time hung heavy on his hands. Moreover, he had been suddenly deprived of the object of his life. He had truly dignified his calling and longed to be about it again, and he envied the men who went to the familiar work unhindered. He sometimes even coveted the chance of those who, with only a nominal freedom, performed the old tasks under the thrall of the "Missionary Monopoly."

This altruistic body was effecting some sweeping changes in the commercial map of the country. Its inception had been marked by a rapid absorption of firms and loosely organized groups. Then came a pause; the American was growing wary. Firms which had declined the first offer of the big corporation in the hope of a better waited in vain. Here and there, all over the

country, factory chimneys grew cold, and staring windows were draped with cobwebs. With the closing of the mills went distress to skilled workmen and common operatives, and the clamor of the anti-trust press. But labor adjusted itself, as it always does, and other factories, better equipped, increased their production. The foster fathers of the American were in pursuit of the greatest good of the greatest number, and this they seemed in a fair way to attain.

Meanwhile there was an opposition to the American, unorganized, to be sure, but none the less decided. Ordway and Evans represented it fairly in Underhill. The former Theodore came to know well and to pity deeply in the course of the winter. The man was aging with foreboding, prophet as he was along the one line of thought with which he was familiar. He had no doubt that the monopoly would eventually absorb his business, and business was his life. His factory had a real personality to him and his hand had touched its every bolt and eccentric and band. He could not bear to lose what he had waited for with all the idealization which lay beneath the rough exterior. Something of this he had tried to tell Theodore in slow, laconic sentences, with tongue-tied spaces of silence. The younger man, differently bred as he was, had

understood. He, too, knew the charm of machinery, the hold of a business perfectly acquired. He was suffering from that lassitude of an aimless life which his companion dreaded.

Theodore offered much comfort in his hopeful fashion. He cited his father's rose-colored forecastings of the righteous course of the combine; he told Ordway that one obscure factory such as his was not worth the enmity of the big monopoly. He proved that a control of two-thirds of the country's output would suffice for the purposes of the American, and that, this once gained, it would trouble its rivals no further. He proved these things so conclusively that he fairly convinced himself.

In fact, he brought himself to a frame of mind that sadly minimized the force and made light of the purposes of the American.

One day he met Mr. Evans in the street and remarked that he was not looking well.

"That's a fact. I'm off for the south of France for the spring, then to Norway and Sweden. I'm going to get out of sight and sound of business, if I can."

"And what becomes of your factory?"

"I have had an offer from the American. It galls, though. I say, Harding, you can have it

for what the American offers if you'll go in and fight the trust."

Theodore's face brightened and then grew wistful. The ownership of such a business was the height of his ambition.

"I mustn't think of it," he said resolutely.

"Come down and talk it over, anyway. That won't do any harm," Evans persisted.

"Or any good either. You can see where it would put me with my father." Theodore's tones were wistful.

"There's no telling. Your father would naturally treat his son better than he would a mere stranger. If you mind your business he will probably let you alone. He doesn't control the whole field — the American doesn't, that is. And if it came to a fight, one organization led by the father and another led by the son would be a drawing card."

"It wouldn't attract anybody with much common sense — all the money and brains on one side," Theodore smiled.

"There's such a thing as having too much money and brains — of falling to pieces of your own weight."

They had entered Evans' factory by this time and were wandering through the basement. Even the throbbing of the powerful engines was

a pleasant sound to Theodore, and the smell of heat and dust and oil as sweet to him as that of flowers. The faces of the women wore frequent smiles for the visitor, while here and there a man nodded. Harding watched the familiar processes with a critical eye, and examined a detail of machinery now and then. At length he said longingly:

"It's a beauty."

"You should have it for what the American offered," and Evans named a price at which Harding caught his breath.

"You see I'm not on the make in this business. It's combine price or nothing. Nobody is going to pay me for the chance to fight the combine," Evans said ruefully. "But I should like to see you have it, Harding. I should like to know the work was going on even if I am shelved," and the quick, nervous voice trembled.

"Well, I'll think it over, Evans. I want to talk to my father and to Mr. Ordway," Harding said thoughtfully.

"You can count on Ordway to back up anything you want to do, if you should have to fight."

Theodore saddled his horse and rode far out into the country that afternoon. The beat of hoofs on the snowy roads accompanied his

thoughts. His keen business instincts, his love for a good bargain, prompted the venture; his weariness of the life of idleness which he had led during the winter also urged him to the step. On the other hand, he knew that his father would have a right to be both hurt and angry, and he knew that the opposition of the American counted for much. The outcome, however, was inevitable with his sanguine temper. He told himself that his father could well afford to let his son alone, and that he would stand in no real danger from that quarter. His mind was almost made up when he rode back home and, stabling his horse, went to consult Mr. Ordway.

He found Miss Ordway writing at her father's desk when he entered the office. Theodore noted, even in his preoccupation, a likeness in contour of face and in a certain high common-sense of expression between Faith Ordway and her father. As he talked to the latter he knew that the girl was listening eagerly. There was a questioning silence after Theodore had told of Evans' offer.

"You ain't goin' to do it?" Mr. Ordway inquired at length.

"I don't know. I wondered what you would think. It's a wonderful bargain."

"It may not be such a bargain before you get done with it."

"But, see here, Mr. Ordway, why is it such a risk?" Theodore was primed with optimistic arguments from his controversy with himself. "Of course I realize that the American can do anything it wants to,— but it isn't going to want to. I intend to mind my own business and keep out of its way. I'm nothing but a fly anyway, in comparison. My insignificance protects me."

"That's all very well for talk, but wait and see," Mr. Ordway commented grimly.

"Well, take your own case. You're all right. They haven't meddled with you."

"Wait an' see."

"Well, use your common sense. Why should a great body like that go out of its way to crush me? We've got into a habit of being afraid of a corporation that, after all, is made up of men very much like anybody else. My father isn't likely to go out of his way to harm his own son." Theodore's tones were eager. He was very anxious to convert his friend to his own way of thinking.

"'Tis a little different with you, I admit. But I wouldn't go to relyin' too much on that. Your father ain't where he can do exactly as he pleases."

"Of course he is only one, but he does have a good deal of power. And the rest of the directors wouldn't be likely to do a thing like that over his veto."

Mr. Ordway shook his head gloomily. "My advisin' of you ain't goin' to do any good, I know, but I wish't you'd keep out of it."

"Well, suppose I do keep out of it," Theodore answered a trifle sharply. "Where am I? This is the only thing I know anything about, or care anything about. One thing is certain — I'm not going to spend another winter like this."

"There's plenty of openings for a young man with capital," Mr. Ordway said persuasively.

"But not such openings as this, with all the risk. You see," he went on, repeating the old familiar arguments —"It isn't as if it was any object to the American to control the entire market. If it has control of three-fourths or even two-thirds, it can set buying and selling prices and wages to a greater or less degree. Of course it can't manage the output so well. We've got to make up our minds to be ruled by it more or less; but that isn't so much different from the laws of trade that govern us anyway."

"Seems to me I've heard the other side from you, full as glib. You're gittin' to be quite a lawyer."

The kindly smile robbed the words of their sting. Theodore smiled shamefacedly.

"I suppose so; but there is something in what I have just been saying. I'm not going back on anything I've believed about the trust. But I have more confidence in my father's management and principles than in those of most financiers. He wouldn't wilfully injure me, and if they should go out of their way to harm me when I'm quietly attending to my business it would be wilful injury."

Mr. Ordway answered this involved argument somewhat skeptically.

"It all talks out well enough. How it's goin' to work is another matter. And suppose, through some such 'mistake,' we'll call it, you do git up against the American? You ought to take all the chances into account."

Harding hesitated.

"I should fight, I suppose."

Faith had been scrawling idly on a blotter which lay before her.

"How will it place you with your father?" she asked.

"He may be very angry and he may not. I can't tell. I'm not planning to do anything that really affects him." Theodore went on eagerly, trying to justify himself.

"But it's setting yourself up against him," Faith persisted.

"It is if he chooses to take it that way. That's not the way I mean it, however. I'm only carrying out my own plans."

Theodore sighed. It was all very perplexing. Mr. Ordway was saying only the things which he had been telling himself. Yet the existence of any serious danger in this experiment seemed the more preposterous as he argued. He did not waver even under this discouragement. Mr. Ordway saw determination beneath his request for advice. So he said:

"I ain't goin' to say nothin' more about it, because I can see plain enough your mind's made up. Maybe 'twill be all right, but it's risky business."

"I'm ready to take the risk," said the young man bravely.

He broached the subject to his father that evening as they sat in the library after dinner. He opened the matter without preparation, and briefly announced his intention. Had he asked for advice as in his conversation with William Ordway, even for advice which he immediately refuted and disregarded, the impression would have been happier. As it was, the abrupt and awkward announcement had an effect of sullen

defiance, widely foreign to Theodore's real feelings. In his relations with his father the son lacked that frank spontaneity which characterized his manner toward others.

Albion Harding eyed his son in silence after his announcement. He had a priceless ability to see in advance the weak spots in his own plans and the possible point of attack. This move, however, he had never anticipated. He had considered all business friction with his son comfortably over. Now his rapid thought foresaw all manner of rankling gossip, all sorts of complications. He knew better than any one else how strong the feeling of opposition was toward the American. He knew that Theodore might be of great help to the opposition forces in any struggle. He knew better than any one else just how the affairs of the American really stood. Into his astonished silence his son threw a word of apology.

"I've stood it as long as I can with nothing to do."

"Yes, I warned you."

"I knew it myself. But it was the only thing to do. I honestly couldn't stay on in the American feeling as I did about that sort of thing."

"I have never felt conscientious scruples about remaining in the American, and I have always

considered my sense of right and wrong fairly well developed," Mr. Harding remarked coldly.

Theodore disregarded his father's thrust.

"I'm sorry to seem to go against you in this way, father. I wanted at least to tell you of it before I took any steps."

"I am thankful for even such traces of filial consideration. But I receive them so seldom that they come as a surprise," the father replied in resigned tones.

"It seems to me there is some consideration due from father to son as well as from son to father," Theodore said quietly. "I come here to tell you of a matter which has caused me a good deal of thought and trouble and you speak to me like that,"— he was angry with himself that his voice quivered.

"I said no more than the truth."

"True or not, things are hard on me. Here I am with only one thing in the world that I can do and you blame me for doing that."

"I'm not blaming you. You have a perfect right to conduct your affairs as you please. I did not understand that you asked my advice."

"No, because I think I have decided. I'm not setting myself against you. I don't intend to run counter to the trust in any way, but only to go quietly about my own business." Theo-

dore's sense of humor realized the absurdity of his tiny business extending philanthropic patronage to the American, but it was too late to take back the words.

"Your magnanimity touches me. I only hope that the American will always be able to keep on as high a plane," Mr. Harding retorted in mocking tones.

"You've no right to make fun of me, father," said Theodore hotly. "I'm in a hard place, and you're the one that's to blame. You've no right to tie up business so that a man can't live the life he has been trained to. To my mind there isn't much liberty in a country where a man can't carry on his business without running it just as one man or a set of men say. I'm sorry I've got to do this thing, but I don't see any other way. At any rate I'm going to try it."

CHAPTER XIV

All things considered, Mr. Harding was placed in a trying position, of which an irritating feature was the necessity of justifying his son's conduct to Roger Burnham. The latter did not spare Mr. Harding's feelings, nor pay him the deference which he expected from his associates. He sometimes wondered why he bore the cynical comments of his subordinate; but he found Burnham very useful and felt that he might need him still more in the future. So he met his criticisms of Theodore's conduct with more patience than he might otherwise have shown.

One morning not long after Theodore's declaration of independence, Burnham entered Mr. Harding's office and opened the conversation bluntly.

"See here, Harding, what's this I hear? Your son is really going to start an opposition to the 'Missionary Monopoly'? So that young ban-

tam of yours has taken the bit in his teeth and run amuck?"

"Your metaphor is slightly faulty," said Mr. Harding with a forced smile.

"And your family discipline — my case is better than yours, I guess. Better a bad metaphor than a bad son," grumbled Burnham.

"There is no truth in the rumor that he has started an opposition to the American. He has merely bought out Mr. Evans. He does not mean to be unfilial. He regrets the step very much. He conscientiously —"

"Oh, bother his conscience! — but if it isn't his conscience, what is it? He can't expect to make money. It's a clear case of ruin. I'm not much of a believer in the 'still, small voice' and stuff of that sort, but it's either pure deviltry — or what you would call conscience, or — look here! Ordway has got a daughter. Red-headed, heavy-built, but a good stepper, carries her head well up, well-groomed sort of girl. Must be the boy is after her."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Harding hastily. "You are altogether astray. My son has some quixotic notions about what his means and knowledge of the business require of him; overstrained and unhealthy, to be sure, but decidedly vital to

him. I cannot really blame him, if it has become a question of right and wrong to him."

"Yes, but you know too much to have such convictions. A man with his conscience under his control is all right, but when it gets the upper hands of him he's no good any more — not in business. In some millennium sort of place he might get along."

Albion Harding shut his lips tightly. Argument was useless, and such topics were best avoided. Burnham went on.

"But the point is, what's to be done?"

"Nothing at present. I have little belief in my son's ability as an organizer should he at any time decide to enter the ranks of an opposition," Mr. Harding answered with some assurance.

"He's got a good deal to back him and help him out. All of the trade that isn't in the deal is swearing mad. They'll swarm together, given somebody to say the word."

"It puts me in a bad position," Mr. Harding said in weary tones. "If he receives any different treatment from the other competing millowners the stockholders have a right to complain. And if I serve him with the same treatment the public will be on my heels for my unfatherly attitude."

"Of course he must be treated exactly the same as the others and you must take the consequences. There's no use; one can't pose as a philanthropist and a financier at the same time. You're doing the financier act just at present, Harding, and you'd better stick to it and throw up the other. The rôles conflict."

"I never tried to do anything but employ the principles of common honesty and decency in business life. All I contended was that a monopoly could be conducted on the basis of those principles, and, so conducted, would be a valuable object-lesson to the country. From that all this ill-timed ridicule has sprung." Mr. Harding spoke in tones of the deepest injury.

"That's all right, Harding, be an object-lesson if you want to. Every one to his taste. That's not what I'm in the business for, however." Burnham dismissed Mr. Harding's self-justification with good-natured contempt. Then he continued:

"Did you see that open letter of Jaffray's in the 'Criterion' this morning?"

"Yes, and I didn't like the tone of it."

"Neither did I. Jaffray is going to make trouble for us next winter in the legislature if he happens to get in."

"He must not get in. We must back a good

man in his place. With our backing he would have a fighting chance at the nomination." Mr. Harding had thought out this point clearly.

"A man we could rely on would stand us pretty well. There are a lot of things we shall want. An 'investigation!' Nonsense, what is there to investigate?" Burnham inquired indignantly.

"Jaffray is always wanting an investigation of something or other, so that doesn't count particularly. As you say, his investigation would not amount to anything. But it would create a wrong impression. No amount of investigating would disclose anything out of the way; but the public generally would think it was only because we had covered it up successfully."

"Who would you put up against Jaffray?" Burnham inquired in a tone into which deference would now and then creep in spite of him.

"I've been thinking of Oakley for the place," Mr. Harding's tone was tentative.

"Pretty good! He's young, bright, there is nothing against him. He's all right on the subject of the trust?"

"Yes, of course. Then, too, he hasn't much money," Mr. Harding went on, "and has practically worked his way up. That will be a drawing card in some quarters. I have had him

in my mind for some time as a good representative for the American, either here or in the national legislature."

"You've got a long head. We'll strike for political power if there seems to be any need of it. I'll attend to the ward politics. They're not quite in your line, nor in mine either, but I know the right men. 'Missionary Monopoly' money shall flow like water in the good cause," and he grinned cynically.

"The money will of course be used in wholly legitimate ways," said Mr. Harding firmly.

"Sure! That was what I meant. Wholly legitimate ways."

Mr. Harding was not blessed with a keen sense of humor; but he more than half suspected that Burnham was laughing at him. He did not waste time in considering this possibility, however. The conversation had suggested a question which he wished to ask his secretary. He called the latter in from the outer room as soon as Burnham had gone.

Late that afternoon Althea Oakley herself opened the door in answer to Reid's ring. She was pale and her eyes were faintly red-rimmed; but she was daintily dressed and forced back her usual gaiety at sight of the guest.

As the three sat chatting in the pretty little parlor, some unwonted air of magnificence caught Reid's quick eye. His gaze finally rested on a large, softly-glowing rug which nearly covered the floor. In a pause of the conversation he said lightly:

"So we've been bringing New York back to Underhill with us. What a beautiful rug, Mrs. Oakley!"

Althea looked at her husband with appealing eyes, and he answered for her.

"Yes, isn't it a beauty? It makes us look quite sumptuous. Althea picked it up at a wonderful bargain."

In spite of the cordiality of Oakley's tone, Reid saw that there was something wrong with this topic of conversation, and left it abruptly by giving Mr. Harding's message.

The little family dinner, perfect in its simple appointments and dainty fare, passed off pleasantly, in spite of Althea's subdued manner. It was all charming to Reid, but he knew, unwillingly enough, of the anxiety beneath the pleasant exterior, and felt no envy. He was thinking that his liberty and prosperity were better, when there came a knock at the door and Theodore was ushered in.

Reid and Theodore met but seldom of late.

The genial friendliness of their intercourse was a thing of the past. Theodore did not forget all that he thought he had owed to Reid, but he felt that Reid was gratifying an idle whim at his expense. He could not help feeling hurt and angry that Reid should so lightly brush away his friend's happiness. So he greeted him with some constraint, the smile fading from his face as he noticed the presence of the guest.

"Have something to eat, old man?"

"No, thanks, Oak. I came up to tell you a piece of news."

"What is it?"

"It doesn't amount to much at present, of course, but I heard Roger Burnham asking George Everett what he thought of you for the state legislature this winter. Of course it may turn out only talk."

"Nonsense!" Oakley laughed, but there was a quiver of excitement in his voice. This would be the first step in a political career.

"Well, I'm not so sure. There's lots of kicking, you know yourself, over Jaffray's last term. He's not so sure of re-nomination as he thinks he is. I've heard any number of men say he ought not to get it again. I don't know that you would stand a bad chance."

"Perhaps that's what Mr. Harding wants to

see you about. He and Burnham were closeted together a long while this morning," said Reid.

"Should you accept the nomination, Oak?" Theodore inquired.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Haven't thought of such a thing before. Of course it would interfere with my practice." Oakley tried to speak unconcernedly.

"You could keep your regular clients and come back and forth more or less, so that people wouldn't forget you. Besides, it isn't for long."

"I don't know that I could afford to do it," Oakley objected.

"Why, of course you can, Marcus," Althea said excitedly. "They pay you — oh dear, I don't know how much, but it's a good deal, and you get lots of things free, passes on the railroads, and all sorts of things. Then you can come back whenever you want to and attend to the clients, just as Mr. Reid said. You'll make a great name for yourself and maybe they'll send you to the Senate. I should enjoy Washington so much, I know."

"Dear me, hear the child!" Oakley laughed delightedly. "She has got me in the United States Senate already. Time and space and ways and means are nothing to her soaring ambition."

"It's my belief the governor and Burnham hatched up this scheme to get somebody friendly to the combine in the place of Jaffray," Theodore said quietly. He did not lack a certain acumen.

"Well, it would be hard lines if I wasn't friendly to the combine. I've profited pretty well by the little business commissions it has thrown in my way. It's a good client," said Oakley complacently.

"Oh, yes, if that's all you think of," said Theodore.

"Teddy, there's danger that you'll get to be a crank," Oakley answered. "It's the tendency of the times — monopoly, I mean. Professor Harkness used to say so, and he knows more about it than I do. I'm glad I studied political economy," he added laughing.

"Yes, it must be convenient to get a lot of ready made opinions all pigeon-holed for use," said Theodore drily.

"You didn't waste any time doing that, did you, Teddy?" Althea retorted, quick to resent any criticism of her husband.

"No, sister, I come to all of these subjects perfectly unbiased," he replied good-naturedly. "But say, Oakley, you'll be a change from Jaffray, with all his rampant ideas."

"After all, Jaffray doesn't go as far as his teacher. Rubinovitch says let the trust go on, and when it gets unbearable the people will rise in wrath and down it. He makes it one of the factors in the millennium he's looking for," Reid spoke idly and with little interest in what he was saying.

"Rubinovitch is a great speaker," Theodore said, with the honest, ungrudging admiration which he always accorded to brilliancy.

"Yes, he knows how to catch his audience; so far, at least, he's a great speaker," Reid commented with less enthusiasm. "It's a pity that he isn't better balanced. There's something unsteady, not quite straight, about him. I'm not sure whether it is drugs, liquor, or something of that sort, or the insanity of genius. He got his audience with him that night of the strike in great style, though."

"I don't know about the insanity of genius. He strikes me as level-headed enough. A man isn't necessarily insane because he doesn't think as you do," Theodore retorted.

"Of course not. Don't get so fierce. You know him and I don't. It was only something about his manner that struck me so. I've never seen him except at his meetings."

After the departure of his guests Oakley sat alone fighting an elation which his experience of late told him was ungrounded. Such good-fortune, if good-fortune it were, was not for him. His anxieties had increased throughout the winter, and an anxious wrinkle had already grown persistent between Althea's brows. Three months had sufficed to show them that there was leakage somewhere, though neither was skilful enough to detect its whereabouts. Althea, accustomed all her life to dainties, did not recognize the fact that many people never tasted grouse or dreamed of buying strawberries in February. The little house which her father had given her and had furnished so simply and quietly, seemed to her taste to be continually calling for some new expenditure. The young wife always had some good reason for each additional outlay; she was always deeply repentant when Oakley pointed out her extravagance, and erred innocently again whenever the occasion offered.

Oakley was thinking gloomily of these things when a small hand slid into his and Althea nestled down beside him.

"You were awfully good to say what you did, dear; I didn't deserve it," she whispered.

"What do you mean?" he queried.

"Why, you know, silly, to say that it made

us look 'sumptuous,' and that I got a good bargain, and to act as if you were pleased."

"However much of a Blue Beard I may be, I want to make people think I'm not a monster." Oakley tried to speak lightly.

"You're not a Blue Beard. You've no right to talk that way. It was all my fault."

"Althea, confess. Don't you think I'm stingy?" Oakley had long had this question in his mind, and now was determined to find out just how Althea felt.

"You don't mean to be, dear. But you have always had to save and be so careful that I suppose you have got the habit. I don't blame you," she added magnanimously.

"Dear, I haven't treated you fairly. I haven't wanted to worry you, but I should have told you more definitely. When I say we can't afford these things I mean it. When I've paid for the rug — don't feel badly, it's all right — we shall have only about ten dollars until some more comes in — and I don't quite know where it's coming from. Of course there will be clients,— there always are," he added reassuringly to her frightened look. "But, you see, when I say we haven't much, I don't mean relatively to a million, but absolutely, really not much."

"Oh, I'll never do it again, really. I didn't

understand," she faltered in tears. "I didn't understand! If I had I would never have done it. But we needed the rug so much, and it was such a good bargain! Why, Ethel has one which she paid two hundred and fifty dollars for that isn't a bit prettier than this."

"You don't know how it hurts me not to be able to give you the things which your friends have. And I don't know, and never can know, half the things which you want and need," Oakley said contritely.

"Oh, I don't mind so much. Only it seems hard when you are young and want things most, not to have them."

"Yes, of course it does, but we have each other, dear, and we knew how it would be. You knew that you must do without the things which you had been used to, but I'm afraid you didn't realize just what it would be like."

Then Oakley saw from his wife's face that he had made the almost fatal mistake of alluding to the circumstances of their marriage. The subject was never definitely mentioned between them, but Oakley guessed that the thought that she had forced herself upon him rankled in Althea's mind. He guessed that her determination to show herself at all social functions, and the dignity and reserve with which she carried her-

self since her marriage, rose from the wish to prove that she had not compromised herself with the world. She faced society fearlessly, more, it sometimes seemed, for his sake than for her own, unwilling that the people whom she had known all her life should think that she had forfeited any of the things worth having in marrying him. She merged her personality in his own recklessly, passionately, and in return she exacted a rigid, unswerving devotion. In marrying Althea, Oakley had cut himself off from all the world besides. He felt a longing sometimes for the old, familiar, manly intercourse with Reid and Theodore; he felt sometimes, with a pang for which he hated himself, that he had inevitably dwarfed and hampered his career by this premature marriage. And he knew in his heart of hearts that they were spending their quick-ripening love too lavishly.

CHAPTER XV

With the coming of the summer months Mr. Harding and Theodore were left alone in the house on the hill. For days at a time they met only at constrained meals and gradually these perfunctory glimpses of each other grew less frequent. Mr. Harding often dined in bitter loneliness, deserted, as he felt, by his son and daughter alike. He missed the healing balm of his wife's presence, and the recurring struggles to harmonize imperative measures with only less imperative ideals told upon him more in her absence. As the summer heat continued unbroken, and overtaxed nerves grew terse, a breach between father and son became inevitable.

The two men sat at dinner one night after a dry, hot July day, Mr. Harding in the punctilious evening garb which no heat or weariness ever made him omit, Theodore in spotless white linen. One of the minor counts which the father held

against his son was that, in spite of a nicety — which would have been called daintiness in a woman — he lacked devotion to times and seasons. He noted tonight, with silent disapprobation, his son's infringement of the unwritten law of the house. He said nothing, however, and the conversation went on in a labored fashion. At last there came some trivial difference of opinion, a cutting comment from Mr. Harding, an unfilial retort from Theodore. Then the father's voice said, in the measured tones of his anger:

"If it were not for your mother, Theodore, I could almost feel it advisable for you to seek a home elsewhere."

"The point is past where any consideration for my mother can count. It is no use and no kindness to her for us to try to get along together. I shall ask you for shelter only tonight," Theodore retorted quickly.

Anger lent to the undersized figure and the hot words an unusual dignity. The father felt a thrill of something like admiration, but it did not lessen his certainty that he was right, that even before this last revolt he had borne more than son should put upon father. So he answered in careful tones.

"You have of course perfect freedom of choice. I hope, however, you will remember that

I have borne much before I uttered this first word of reproach."

Theodore did not answer, but left the room with close-shut lips, conscious that tonight the final word had been said. His quick fulminating anger, usually drowned in repentance before his father's slower wrath had kindled, had once more betrayed him. Yet cooler thought told him that this after all was the solution of the problem. He might live on friendly terms with his father if they were not held to the friction of daily intercourse. He could not believe in any separation more serious than had already existed between them, even while he packed his possessions and prepared to move them to a big unused room in the storehouse adjoining his mill.

He found pleasure in arranging his room, and in his new freedom from restraint, yet he was far from happy. He was not living the life for which he was fitted, which his nature demanded. Affectionate, domestic, he should have married early; he should have had children already about him. He should have gone the daily rounds of a business which he honored, free from perplexing conflict for a doubtful principle. Instead he was caught up into a fierce struggle, lonely in spite of his many friends, with no real company save that of his dog, flouted by the lady of his

love, and, he sometimes thought, betrayed by his friend.

He sat one night in his dusky room, with the wind blowing strong from the river and a bar of moonlight lying across the floor, and thought of some of these things. He picked softly at his banjo, and as he played he gained something of the same peace from his tinkling music that his father did from the solemn chords of the organ.

As he sat there, half-dreaming, he heard the big door at the foot of the stairs open, and Mrs. Ordway's voice exclaim:

"Goodness, father, look at them stairs! An' I ain't a mite of doubt Mr. Harding goes up over 'em full tilt a dozen times a day."

"Wal, he ain't so hefty as you be, mother," Mr. Ordway answered.

"You mustn't hurry, mother. I'm really afraid to have you get so out of breath," Faith exhorted.

"I should feel real tried if we should climb up here and find he was out," Mrs. Ordway's breathless voice continued.

"He is at home, Mrs. Ordway, and glad of company," Theodore's voice rang out cheerfully. "I'm just striking a light."

"You mustn't live up so many flights if you

want fat old women to come to see you Mr. Harding," Mrs. Ordway said, laughing.

"You're not a fat old woman, Mrs. Ordway. Is she, Mr. Ordway? I wonder you can stand there and hear her misrepresent herself so."

"I've seen her slimmer and I've seen her younger," Mr. Ordway answered, "but she suits me well enough as she is."

"Sho, father!" said Mrs. Ordway in flattered tones. Then, changing the subject, "Ain't this a pretty room, Faithy? I say, you're fixed up comfortable enough, Mr. Harding."

The long, high room was in truth attractive. The windows were as yet uncurtained, but they were cushioned with crimson. The walls were hung thick with pictures of animals or woodland scenes, engravings from Landseer and Rosa Bonheur, and paintings with lesser names attached. Lounging chairs were scattered here and there, and golf clubs, tennis rackets and an arsenal of weapons filled the corners. The banjo stood beside Theodore's chair and a current magazine lay open on the table. The room spoke everywhere of a simple, wholesome, out-of-door nature. Something of this Faith saw, and said as she turned to Theodore:

"It is very pleasant, and somehow it seems to

fit you. I always like it when the room and the person go together."

The four sat down and chatted idly. Mr. Ordway, as usual, left most of the conversation to the others, and stared upon the floor with knitted brows. Theodore knew that something was troubling him, and shortly the matter came out.

"I've got an interestin' paper that maybe you'd like to see. You've kep' up with the business so fur." He drew a letter from his pocket and unfolded it with blunt, clumsy fingers. Theodore took it and read it slowly, handing it back at length with a grim smile.

"Pointed at least. What are you going to do?"

Ordway shoved forward his chin in an aggressive way of his own.

"What do you suppose?" he said doggedly. "Do you think I'm goin' to give up what I've worked for all my life at the word of a concern like this?"

The words and the face were defiant, but the voice shook. Theodore knew that the outer resolution covered a hidden despair. But he ignored the ill-concealed emotion.

"So they've written you before?"

"Yes, and I didn't answer it. It warn't busi-

ness-like, I suppose, but I couldn't seem to bring myself to it. There wasn't nothin' to say. I ain't goin' to sell to 'em, at that price or any other. I suppose the letter means that they will cut selling prices in my line."

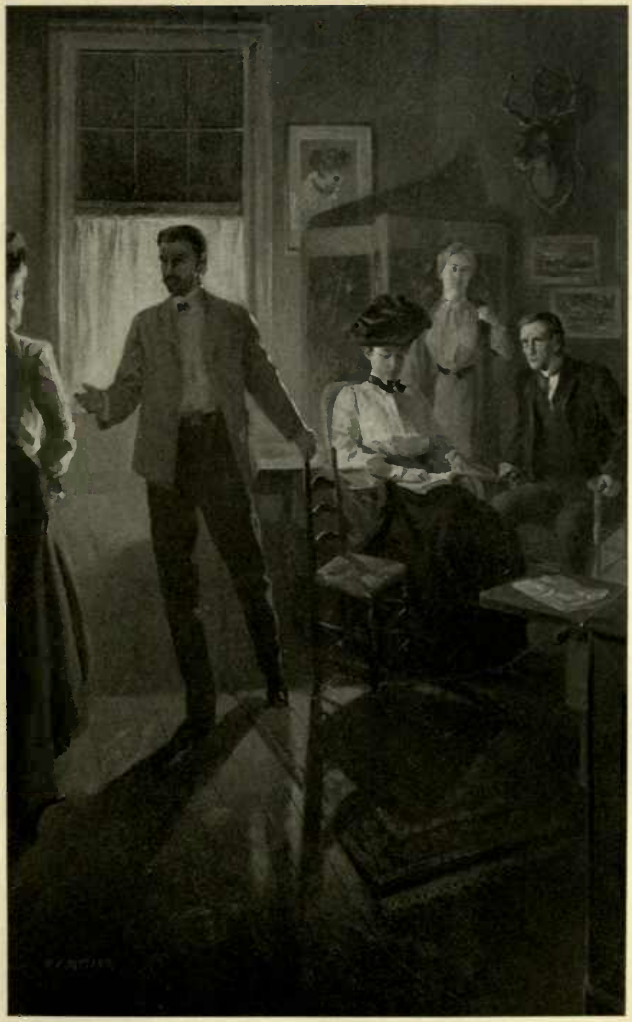
"Yes, can you stand it?"

"I can for awhile. I ain't makin' much now, but I could clear considerable less an' still keep my head above water." There was a ring of determination in the rough voice.

"You haven't so much outgo as a man like Burnham, for instance."

"I was tellin' Faithy comin' along that I was glad to have 'em come out this way. I've got fidgety waitin' and wonderin' what they'll do. Now the fight's on it seems good. I feel just like it. There ain't much use in it, I s'pose; but there, who knows? Sometimes big concerns go all to smash in a minute. I mean to fix things so't mother will be all right; an' Faith can look after herself any time. Then I'm goin' to sail in. It's a rascally business, that's what it is, and there ain't any reason that I can see why it should rule the country. There's one man, if he ain't a rich one an' not of much account, who ain't goin' to be trod on."

A thoughtful silence followed Ordway's



speech. Then he said, making a visible effort at cheerfulness:

"Wal, there's nothin' to do but keep a stiff upper lip."

Harding looked at the scarred and workworn face before him — a face which bore everywhere the traces of wearing toil. Anger flared up in his heart that his father, reared to the easy things of life, should embitter this late and hard-won prosperity. He felt, however, that Mr. Ordway wished to change the subject, and turning to Faith, said lightly:

"You like dogs, I know, Miss Ordway. Here are some splendid pictures of prize-winners in this magazine."

The two heads, the auburn and the black, were bent over the paper when a light, uncertain step sounded on the stair and Mrs. Harding stood, slender and girlish and undecided in the doorway.

Theodore rose from his desk with a startled "Mother!" Mr. and Mrs. Ordway half-rose and looked at each other in embarrassment. Faith alone, after a glance over her shoulder, went on turning the leaves of the magazine.

Harding regained his poise in an instant's time and went through the necessary introductions easily enough. His first thought had been of

some calamity, his next that the fact that he had left home could now no longer be concealed from his mother. There was no chance for explanation, however, while the Ordways stayed. This they did but a few minutes longer. Mrs. Harding's manner, though not lacking in courtesy or even in cordiality, did not invite a longer call.

When at last the outer door closed behind them, Mrs. Harding leaned forward in her chair and grasped her son's wrist tightly.

"Tell me, Theodore," she said tensely, hardly above a whisper, "Is it that girl?"

Theodore gazed at her, with his mouth slightly open in surprise and bewilderment.

"Is what — what girl?" he stammered finally, with no slightest glimmer of her meaning.

"Oh, I know. I might have known all along that it was something more than principle and conviction that made you do it," she said chokingly.

Theodore at last caught some inkling of her meaning.

"Oh, you mean have I got at odds with father on Miss Ordway's account?"

"No, I didn't mean that you had quarreled with your father about her; but I thought you might have taken up with her father's side on her account," Mrs. Harding faltered.

"Nonsense, mother!" Theodore laughed in a relieved tone. "I hardly know Miss Ordway, honestly. Besides, she is Reid's, along with others, if he chooses to take her. I thought you knew who I cared about."

"But I couldn't help thinking of something of the kind when I saw you there together as I came up the stairs. Oh, Theodore, I could bear anything but that!"

"I don't see why you feel that way, mother," Theodore answered stoutly. "She is one of the finest girls I ever met. She is just as much of a lady as Althea."

"I don't see how she can be, with that awful father and mother."

"They're good, kind people, and they are more my sort than the people up on the Hill. They were always a cut above me. I've found my level at last," replied Theodore.

"I feel some way as if this awful break between you and your father were all my fault. If I had stayed at home it might never have come about." Mrs. Harding was very near to tears as she reproached herself.

"You mustn't say that, mother. Father and I are really no further apart than we have been most of the time for ever so long. We are fac-

ing matters fairly, that's all. There was no use trying to keep on that way."

"How am I going to bear it, Theodore, to have you away? It was hard when you were at college and I knew it was only for a little while; but this!—" Tears had come in earnest now.

"Don't, mother," said Theodore, kneeling beside her chair and putting an arm about her. "I shall come up and have tea with you every afternoon and have an hour's talk with you; and you will come and see me whenever you are down town. And my father and I can meet pleasantly now and then. It's a great deal better than the old way, believe me. If I had married I couldn't have stayed at home with you."

"But that would have been different. It would have been natural. Then I shouldn't have had to think of you alone here. You weren't meant to live alone, Theodore." Theodore gave no sign that he felt the truth of this remark keenly. His voice was steady and cheerful as he said:

"Oh, I get along nicely. I have Dave. Don't you worry about me, mother. Must you go?" he added, as Mrs. Harding picked up her light wrap.

"Yes; I told Harvey to be here at ten. I've hardly seen you, dear boy. I wanted to persuade

you to give up this wild scheme. Much as I admire you for standing by your principles I can't help seeing that you are doing yourself a great harm. Come back with me to Old Point Harbor Wednesday and think things over. Margaret has been very gentle and thoughtful lately. Perhaps —" and she paused suggestively.

"No, mother, there's no use. Margaret doesn't like anything I do. I should make some mistake. I can never suit her."

"She is unsettled and unhappy, Teddy, and doesn't know her own mind. Be patient."

"I'm tired of being patient. If there was any hope for me,— but there isn't. When is she going to know her own mind? She's twenty-four, and has had this subject before her for six or eight years."

Mrs. Harding saw that he was in no mood for comfort. So she took her leave after appointing a meeting for the next day. Then Theodore went back to his chair and clashed his banjo strings until Dave growled in his sleep and shook his silken ears. Finally a string broke with a twang, and Theodore laid down the instrument just as he heard still another step on the stairs.

His visitors had been of an unexpected sort this evening and this last was no less so. Francis Reid had not been in the habit of intruding

his company on his friend of late, so Harding greeted him with no little surprise.

Reid sank into a comfortable chair and gazed about him lazily.

"I'm tired as a dog," he said in his slow tones, "but somehow I can't sleep. I saw your light as I was wandering about and thought I would come up. Cosy here, aren't you?"

"I like it. I've been having a regular reception here tonight. Mr. and Mrs. Ordway and Miss Ordway, my mother, and now you."

"Then your mother is in town?"

"Yes, she came up for a few days. She is never really content away from Underhill. But she is going back Wednesday."

"Why, then —" began Reid, and paused.

"You and my father are going down for a fortnight, aren't you?" Theodore asked, with as much ease as he could muster.

"Yes, I was thinking that we would probably go down when Mrs. Harding does. Why don't you come too, Teddy?"

"Oh, I'm too busy. Besides, there isn't much sense in my going. In fact, I think I would rather stay here."

"You ought to take some sort of a vacation."

"I shall take mine later. A hunting trip in the fall suits me better than loafing around sum-

mer resorts," Theodore answered a little brusquely.

"That would be pretty good fun. Deer?"

"Yes; it's great."

"Let me know when you are going and perhaps I'll join you, if you care for a companion."

"Miss Favor is at the shore with your mother and sister, isn't she?" Reid queried, after a pause. Then he felt anger and scorn of himself that he had asked a question whose answer he knew so well. Theodore responded somewhat coldly. Their intercourse was continually coming upon just such embarrassing moments. In truth, he felt but little eagerness for the proffered company on his trip into the woods.

CHAPTER XVI

That autumn brought so much trouble and perplexity to Theodore Harding that he needed his hunting trip long before it came. September and October were anxious months to the whole family, darkened as they were by Althea's serious illness. She hovered on the borderland of life for weeks, and only came back hesitatingly at last. During this common anxiety Mr. Harding and his son met as friends. Their thoughts were so preoccupied that both were unmindful when together of the fact that the big national organization was still pressing its insignificant rival, William Ordway, closely, and that Theodore was increasingly active in the affairs of the opposition.

Theodore was in fact gradually outgrowing his hope of the spring, that he might be allowed to exist peacefully alongside the American. His affairs were prosperous enough, but he had come

to feel that this good fortune was permitted by the American rather than wrested from it. He had a growing sense that the combine might not always be so complacent.

The American did not lack certain encouragements through the autumn months. It had passed through the first and most trying year of its history without failure. It had gained a local victory in electing its representative to the state legislature. In spite of the apathy which anxiety lent Oakley, and even Mr. Harding, the latter fact had somehow come to pass. Burnham could have told how with a reasonable amount of detail; his superior, however, did not question him. There was a large sum for campaign expenses, to which the American contributed, unprotestingly, its quota. Roger Burnham was gaining power as the months passed. Wholly unrecognized in the administration of the big monopoly, he was yet its president's most trusted agent. Reid alone knew of the interviews which the two men held daily; he alone guessed a tithe of the commissions which Burnham performed. What Reid knew of his chief's relations to the subordinate he disapproved,— he was in fact beginning to see Mr. Harding more clearly, stripped of the glamor which had at first surrounded him.

This brought him nearer toward sympathy with Theodore. In fact, they set out upon their hunting trip with a frank enjoyment of each other's society which they had not felt for months. As Underhill and Margaret Favor and the American slipped further and further behind them, their reserve was dissipated in the light-hearted joy of their outing.

The weather was almost summer-like. The grey boughs of the leafless trees had a glint of green like that of April. The waters of the woodland lakes glimmered pearl-like and tranquil as on summer mornings. There was the odor of pine smoke in the air and a pale blue haze hung over the distant hills. As they slowly penetrated farther into the woods, the stations grew more primitive, the character of the country more unvarying in its monotony of hemlock, until at length they reached the homely good cheer of the big inn which formed the terminus of the railroad.

They aimed, however, for a camp twenty miles farther in the woods, and were dismayed to find that no guide was available for their tramp. The landlord advised them to wait at the hostelry, but this they were loth to do. Theodore had been over the route before, and thought he might be able to find the way with the help of a compass.

Reid minimized the difficulties, as the man unfamiliar with the big woods is likely to do. At length, when they found that the camp was amply stocked with provisions and that no packing would be necessary, they decided to push on at once. So at noon they were seated in a dry hollow under a pine, far upon their journey. The needles of countless seasons made a springy cushion, and they rested after their luncheon, watching the green boughs wave back and forth against the sky.

"We must have made three miles an hour — we've found it pretty easy walking so far. We can rest an hour and have four hours to do the other eleven miles in. Then we'll get there before dark," Reid estimated.

"Yes, and won't it be great, getting there! It's a fine place, Frank. There's a big fireplace in the main room and a stove in the little cook-room. We'll have a roaring fire in the fireplace, and stretch ourselves in the bunks, and just doze. There's nothing like it. You don't want to talk or read or do anything but look at the fire and go to sleep and wake up and look at the fire and go to sleep again. I believe this compass needle is screwed too tight," he broke off abruptly, as he turned the little toy about in his fingers. "See how slowly it moves!" He pried

out the glass, and turned the tiny screw with his knife blade.

Just at that moment Reid, who lay stretched at full length by Theodore's elbow, turned over. Theodore's "Look out!" came a moment too late. Reid hit his friend's arm and the delicate machine was upset.

The two men looked at each other for a speechless moment. What chance was there of finding the tiny bit of magnetic iron among the thousands of brown pine needles!

"Oh, thunder!" groaned Theodore. "Why didn't I know enough to let the thing alone?"

Reid indulged in no reproaches. "I didn't know I was so near," was all he said. "Don't stir. It must have fallen right here."

Reid hunted breathlessly, then the other took his turn, then both together searched, sifting the leaves deeper and wider in their hopeless quest. Finally they paused as by common consent and looked at each other.

"It's no use, Teddy," said Reid gently. "It's gone. We've got to make the best of it without it. The sun is shining, at any rate."

"Yes, and it's two o'clock. We must go on, if we don't go back."

"Oh, we'd better keep on. We can strike north well enough by the sun."

So the two faced toward the unknown forest and pushed on briskly.

When the sun, all too soon, sank red behind the evergreens, darkness fell rapidly over two weary men, plodding through what seemed to be a hemlock swamp. The autumn had been very dry, and there was no water to turn them aside, no bog to entrap them. But they sank above their ankles here and there in the dry, white spagnum, tripped upon roots and skirted deep holes where, it was evident, water habitually lingered.

"This looks as if it might be near Beaver Pond. If it is, all we have to do is to skirt the west shore until we come to the camp. Remember how it looked on the map?" said Theodore cheerfully, adding, "We've certainly been twenty miles."

"Forty, at least," Reid answered in tones which he tried to make light. Harding eyed him sharply.

"Look here, Frank! I'm afraid you're done up. You look pretty white. This sort of thing is different from any tramping you're used to. I was stupid not to realize that you're not hardened to it as I am. We ought to have rested more."

Reid's face was drawn and haggard, but he answered bravely:

"Oh, I'm all right. We haven't got time to rest if we're going to make camp tonight."

They plodded along in silence for some fifteen minutes more. Then the ground gradually began to ascend. Theodore stopped.

"I guess we'd better camp here," he said in decisive tones. "There's no use in going it blind. When it comes morning we can climb a tree and get a look about us."

Reid had sunk wearily to the ground.

"Shall we build a fire?" he said.

"Better not, I guess," Theodore answered. "We might have all the woods ablaze, it's so dry. If we had anything to cook we'd venture on a little one; but it's warm, and I guess we can stand it. I wish we hadn't eaten all the luncheon. But we can have a smoke and a drop of whiskey."

"Water would go better, wouldn't it?"

"That's a fact, but the whiskey will be warming."

They slept that night in a sheltered hollow with pine needles heaped high above them and awoke to a sunless sky and a wind roaring among the treetops. Theodore climbed a tree, hoping to discover the lake. One low ridge rose beyond

another, any one of which might conceal the little pond. Everywhere was the same dark, monotony of hemlock, scowling and unfriendly beneath the lowering sky.

They said little as they took up the way again. Their parched lips moved with difficulty, and it seemed a waste of strength to form the words. At length they came to a spring, half-choked with debris. The water was brackish, but sweeter to them than any draught they had ever tasted. Theodore had shot two squirrels, and now cheered by the water he roasted them with the skill of the practiced camper, while Reid watched the fire closely, beating out creeping tongues of flame lest the whole forest should puff up in one gigantic bonfire.

For a little while after their meal the two men pressed on with renewed courage. The food and drink had fairly made them over. Soon, however, Reid began to lag, and when Theodore looked back at him showed a face white and contorted as if with pain.

"What's the matter, old man?" Theodore said, shocked at the change in his friend's appearance.

Reid tried to smile, but only succeeded in twisting his face in a ghastly fashion.

"Oh, it's nothing. I probably had too much

dinner," he gasped grimly, game to the last. "Keep on. I'll be all right in a few minutes."

"Sit down and rest. You'll feel better. That wasn't the right kind of thing for you to eat when you were half-starved. I should have given you malted milk." Theodore tried to jest, but his heart was very heavy. He felt somehow, he hardly knew why, that Reid was very ill.

The latter seated himself, without protest, on the ground, with his back to a tree. Harding sat down beside him and eyed him furtively. Soon the dull, lustreless eyes closed and Reid's chin fell upon his breast. Harding kept his melancholy watch unheeded. Overhead slatey clouds, tinged on their swelling folds with a peculiar yellowish hue, drifted rapidly. At intervals a crow's harsh note floated down from above. As far as he could see dark stems of hemlock and spruce closed in on either side. Even the floor of the forest was dark with some bushy ground-hemlock which somehow added to the sense of a stern luxuriance of vegetation hemming them in.

Harding was at length fairly facing the conviction that they were hopelessly lost. He knew that unless they had wandered far from their course they should have reached the foot of Beaver Pond long before. Once past this land-

mark there was little to guide them. Moreover, they could not travel far until Reid should be better. As Harding studied the flushed face and deeply hollowed cheeks he felt that this could not be soon.

For lack of anything better to do he stooped to adjust the strap of his legging. Something fell from it with a metallic clink upon the rock beneath him. Theodore picked it up and gazed at it in speechless wonder. It was the compass needle! Through all their wanderings the bit of metal had stuck there. Now when it was little better than useless it came to light. He fixed it once more upon its pin with a heart full of bitterness. There was something cruelly sportive about this freak of fate, which gave them back their guide just when they were so hopelessly lost that it could tell them nothing. They might be skirting the east shore of Beaver Pond, or the west; they might have been wandering all day in circles. If they could have found the compass needle last night, before they had so hopelessly lost their sense of direction, they would have been safe. Now, however, only despair seemed left for them.

His bitter thoughts were broken in upon by a rustle as Reid, still sleeping, toppled over to one side and gently sank upon the ground. The

shock of the fall roused the sick man in some measure and he opened his eyes slowly. Dull and uncomprehending at first, they brightened a little, as Theodore said cheerfully:

"Well, Frank, old man, how do you feel? Rested? I've got some good news for you. I've found the compass needle. It had fallen into a strap of my legging and had stuck there all this time. Perhaps the buckle attracted the iron, or the other way about. Now we can go on. That's right. I'll help you up. Now put your arm over my shoulder. That's it. Now we'll get along finely."

Reid did not think clearly enough to have any of Theodore's doubts in regard to the efficacy of the compass needle. He had just enough strength left to obey orders. He leaned heavily on his friend's shoulder and stumbled along painfully, with compressed lips and eyes that hardly seemed to see the dreary woodland ahead. Theodore with his arm about his companion, and the two rifles slung over his shoulder, pressed on almost blindly. One route was much the same as another. He hardly knew why he was travelling at all. A single thought, however, possessed him. If they could but reach water before they had to stop their chances would be doubled. Not only could they satisfy their

thirst; but they would stand a better chance of shooting game which would seek water at a great distance through the parched forest.

Theodore knew, moreover, that the streams of that region flowed toward the south. If they could but find running water they would have a sure, if desultory guide. Beside a stream they could rest until they gained strength to follow its windings back to civilization. So Theodore pushed on over the uneven surface of the wood. Often the space between the trees was only wide enough for one, and he guided the drooping figure through, bruising himself recklessly in his haste. Sometimes the sick man stumbled and fell to his knees, and Harding had to drag him to his feet. Reid was, at any time, a heavier man than his companion and now bore down with a cruel, lifeless weight. The rifles dragged and their straps cut sharply. They were all the time swinging wild and catching on the crowding tree-stems. The perspiration stood on Theodore's forehead and dripped down over his face in spite of the chill of the day. And still he pressed on, for miles it seemed to him, faint with hunger, spent with travel and sleeplessness, with knees that trembled and feet that seemed to belong to someone else, and to stumble on independently of any volition of his own; with breath

that grew shorter and heart that hammered louder. But still his ears were strained eagerly, anxiously.

To his impatience the wood seemed full of voices,— the roar of the smoke-laden wind in the tree-tops, the creak of branches, the scream of distant jay or crow, the chatter of a squirrel, the crash of their own clumsy footfalls; but among them all Theodore listened for one sound, the trickle of running water.

At last there seemed to come to his ears a sound different from the others. A score of times he had thought he had heard it before, and as many times had only felt his heart sink with hopeless disappointment; but this was something different. It persisted even after the two men paused. Reid sank to his knees with the first opportunity, but Harding could not stop even for his friend to rest. He ran on by himself breathlessly until the sounds became unmistakable. It was the trickling of a stream, a little accented plash, as if the water fell from a height. Theodore stood for a second, until he was sure that his ears had not deceived him. Then he said softly, "Thank God!"

With commands and entreaties he once more roused his friend, and almost carried him through the dense woods that crowded the bank of the

stream to the little opening which edged it. There a rare maple had cast its scarlet leaves into a hollow at its foot, and in this sheltered nook Theodore heaped a bed and laid his friend. Then he doled out water to his companion in meagre sips, and drank sparingly himself. He bathed the sick man's fevered hands and face and made him as comfortable as possible — all the time feeling a glow of hope about his heart. For the ooze of the stream side was printed thick with the tracks of deer.

CHAPTER XVII

Harding tried in vain to sleep. His own weariness, Reid's starts and moans, the unabated roaring of the wind, all conspired against him. Finally he sat up and drew forth his cigar case, fingering the precious contents eagerly. He reached for a match, then paused irresolute. This was their sole store, for the full box had been jerked unnoted from the pocket of his hunting coat in the day's wanderings. Who knew what their need might be? Still he hesitated. He was cold and hungry and lonely; it seemed to him that he had never met such temptation before. He rolled the fragrant cylinder between his fingers, smelled of it, held it against his lips. He realized with a rush of self-contempt that his eyes were wet. He closed the case resolutely; he must husband their every resource.

He had at length fallen into a light doze, when a voice woke him. Clear and distinct, it said:

"Call her once before you go,
Call once yet,
In a voice that she will know:
Margaret! Margaret!"

Coming out of the rushing blackness, with no association of familiarity to the hearer's ears, the words had a personal appeal which they would have lacked under ordinary circumstances.

"Call her once before you go,
Margaret! Margaret!"

The voice repeated, dying away monotonously.

Then the tones changed as the voice murmured softly, liltingly:

"Ah, they bend nearer —
Sweet lips, this way."

That vivid, irregular face, the pink, mocking lips stood for a moment out of the darkness; and Theodore felt a throb of fierce jealousy as the possible meaning of the words flashed over him. But he crushed down the feeling, angry at himself. It was no time for such thoughts. The gloomy prophecy of the words was to be verified; they were facing death together, and any rivalries were paltry and of the past.

The past seemed strangely sweet as he sat there in the loud-voiced darkness, with the melancholy music of the verse ringing in his ears. His instinctive belief in a future and better life did not neutralize the pleasures of the present

one. He kept his lonely watch with a dull ache in his heart for the least of the homely things which had seemed trivial before.

At length the brightening of the sky told him that day was at hand. Stiff with cold he loaded his rifle and took his way to the spot which he had marked the night before. He had hardly placed himself cautiously in position when a big buck stood before him. He fired and brought it down in its tracks. He hastily cut out a little meat and hurried with it to the camp, only to find the hollow beneath the maple deserted. Reid had risen in his delirium and wandered off into the forest.

Flinging down the meat, Harding ran out into the wood in widening circles, calling his friend's name. The trees alone echoed back his anxious cries. How could Reid, weak as he seemed, have wandered so far? Why did not some kindly instinct prompt him to answer? This, of all the misfortunes of the expedition, thoroughly unnerved Theodore. Dreadful visions of the sick man, dying of hunger and thirst in the midst of plenty, rushed through his mind; he almost accused himself as a murderer, and found himself half sobbing as he gasped the lost man's name.

At length the alien sound of a human voice

guided him to the spot where Reid walked wearily and aimlessly.

"Speaking of hell," he murmured, "Dante didn't know anything about hell. It's trees, dark-stemmed hemlock trees, crowding up around you till you can't think or anything. I know because I've been there. And if the compass needle is lost, how are you going to get on? To be sure the points of the compass are all on the stand, but sometimes they point one way and sometimes they point the other, and how can you tell any more which way to go, I should like to know?"

When Harding tried to lead his friend back to the camp the latter grappled with him fiercely. "Let me alone! If it hadn't been for your infernal meddling the points of the compass would have pointed all one way. At least I think they would have. Who are you, anyway? I thought you were Theodore Harding."

Reid gradually grew quieter under the influence of Harding's soothing words, and consented to be led back into camp. There he sank down submissively in his leafy bed and soon fell into a sleep quieter than that of the night. But much to Theodore's dismay, the sick man refused the food which he hurriedly prepared.

As Harding ate his own meal he pondered.

Reid must have food to help him fight the fever. The trout flies twisted in his hat band suggested another expedient, but he dared not leave Reid alone. At length he hardened his heart and fastened him firmly to the maple by the straps which had slung the rifles, unmindful of his querulous imprecations.

Two days passed, leaden, interminable, day and night alike resolving themselves into the performance of the necessary duties and a fascinated watching of Reid's flushed face. The sick man murmured by the hour the minor, doubting verse which denied or questioned all the things which Theodore believed. It seemed to the tortured man sometimes that the mocking words might be true! 'If there were a God, where was he?' He tried to pray in a fragmentary fashion, but through his prayers stole the innuendo of the skeptic voice. He was sadly puzzled also what to do for his friend. Even the limited appliances at his command offered a chance for a blunder. Should he give the patient a little of the precious whiskey? Should he urge the distasteful food upon him? He struggled on, however, choking back the thought which sometimes came to him that it were wisest for both of them if he made a swift push for aid.

The wind continued to blow strongly, bring-

ing with it heavy volumes of smoke. Harding knew that it might have come from a great distance, that it might be no harbinger of evil. But at length a leaf, burned to a gray skeleton of ribs, fell into his outstretched hand. Brands and ashes soon came floating through the air, strewed the pool, and danced in the eddies of the little fall. Theodore's anxiety was confirmed. He felt sure that unless the wind changed they would be directly in the path of a forest fire.

At half-past ten o'clock on the morning of the third day at the brookside, it was almost dark. Big brands were borne glowing through the air to fall hissing in the stream. It was sultry with the heat of midsummer and breath was almost impossible. Harding shivered, in spite of the warmth, at the thought of being overpowered in the rush of the flames before he could carry out the scheme which he had in reserve. Action of any kind was better than waiting, and he climbed to the top of a giant hemlock to reconnoitre. A great wind roared in the tree-tops and swayed his uncertain perch dizzily. Clinging tightly, Theodore looked off to the southward, across miles of dark forest. Over it hung a heavy sky of a peculiar yellowish hue. Far to the south, forming in ever-advancing horizon-line, rolled a

cloud of dingy smoke and a jagged, scarlet fortalice of flame.

One glance told him that there was no time to lose. He scrambled recklessly downward, tearing his hands and his already tattered clothing. As he reached the ground, he saw little shy wood-creatures come rushing into the clearing in their flight from the fire. He seized Reid, light now and fever-wasted, and dragged him to the edge of the stream. There he waited while the roar of the flames came nearer and the heat grew more intense.

The little pool was four or five feet deep and perhaps ten feet across. No trees grew close to the bank. Harding did not doubt that the impetus of the fire would carry it across the stream; but he hoped that by crouching low and covering their heads while the fiery blast passed over, they might escape. At any rate it was their only chance.

The heat grew unbearable. Half supporting, half dragging Reid, Harding waded into the pool and crouched there, holding his rebellious but weak friend down beside him. The water was deadly chill after the heat of the air. The cold penetrated to the bone. The teeth of the two men chattered even while they gasped for breath.

As the heat grew fiercer they sank lower in the water.

Beside them, in the borders of the stream, crouched frightened wild things. A rabbit worked its quivering ears and a fox edged closer as if for protection, its splendid brush floating out on the water. Harding saw all these things without surprise. It seemed but natural that all feuds should be buried before the common enemy. His whole mind was concentrated on their safety. He was having no more trouble with Reid. He hung, a heavy weight on his companion's arm, and seemed to have fainted. Theodore thought with a pang that the shock would probably kill the sick man.

At last the final moment came. Theodore's smoke-blinded, smarting eyes could see the tree-stems stand out black against the solid wall of flame which advanced upon them. The shrivelling, scorching wind took away his breath, and the heat stung his cheek. He grasped Reid and together the two men sank beneath the surface of the pool while the flames roared over them.

Harding rose for an instant, bearing his friend with him, for a breath of the furnace-like air, then sank again. The water seemed warm now, and he had ceased to shiver. When again he came to the surface the heat was endurable

and he paused to glance off where the flames went roaring on their course. After a few moments he waded to a water-soaked log that extended some distance into the pool and seated himself there, holding Reid in his arms. He realized that it would be a long time before the ground would be cool enough to be bearable, so he prepared himself for his dreary vigil.

Dusk had grown into dark, a darkness lighted weirdly by the still blazing tops of the big hemlocks. The fire had flashed past without burning deeply, and the trunks of the trees stood scorched, bare of foliage and smaller branches. Now and then one would stream up once more in brilliant fire works to the stars, faintly shining through the haze of smoke. Harding watched the uncanny scene dumbly, with gasping breath and smarting eyes. He had not given up. He was still pluck to the bone, but he was obliged to confess that the outlook was not hopeful. Reid leaned against his shoulder in an exhaustion which seemed to Theodore more ominous than the former delirium. He could hardly be sure that any breath parted the sick man's lips. He felt certain at times that his friend had died there in his arms. Little by little all thought of the future, all solicitude for his companion, was driven from Harding's mind

by his own discomfort and the horror of his position. The numbness of his arms, the intolerable smarting of his eyes and throat, his gasping, choked breathing, alone absorbed his attention. Three times he propped the unconscious Reid against the log and waded ashore to see if the ground had become bearable. The third time he went back for his friend, and in a moment was stretched beside him on the hot ground utterly spent.

As he turned restlessly over, steaming in his damp clothes, Harding felt a hand on his, a hand cool and moist. A voice said close to his ear,

"What is it, Teddy? What's the matter? I can't seem to make it out. I've been sick, haven't I?"

"You've been a little off your feed along back," responded Theodore hoarsely. "I've been trying a reversed Turkish bath on you. It seems to have done you good."

Theodore's careless, matter-of-fact words satisfied Reid for a few minutes. He studied the problem for a time and then said weakly.

"You're jollying me. What makes the ground so hot? How did we get here?"

"Your head isn't hot any more, and that's the important thing at present," the other an-

swered, ignoring the question. "How do you feel, anyway?"

"My head doesn't ache now, but I feel faint," Reid answered weakly.

"Are you sure you aren't hungry?" Theodore asked after a little pause. He sprang up and hurried to the tree where he had placed the venison. The meat was charred black in the burned fork of the tree; but as Harding eagerly cut in with his hunting knife he found that it was still fresh and juicy within. He cut out a piece, and over a fire which he kindled with difficulty from the charred brands, he cooked the meat a little, and pressed out its juice for his friend. Too weary to prepare any more for himself he ate the tasteless fibres remaining and flung himself once more upon the ground.

His tired limbs had never touched a bed that seemed more pleasant, but he could not sleep. Reid, too, was wide awake, and as he seemed stronger after his light meal, Theodore gradually explained the situation. He spoke simply, not magnifying his own part in the matter; but Reid made allowance for his friend's modesty and realized that he owed his life to that unfaltering courage.

"The worst of it was," the simple narrative ended, "that I couldn't do anything, and wasn't

sure that the things I could do weren't the worst possible ones. I thought taking you into the water there would finish you, and it looks as if it helped you."

The late November dawn disclosed a gloomy scene to the swollen, inflamed eyes of the two wanderers. As far as they could see stretched the forest, bleak and bare. Here and there some old tree-trunk or stump smoked briskly, telling of hidden fires within ready to burst forth at any time. The ground and the trees everywhere sent up languid coils of smoke that changed from faint blue to pink in the light of the rising sun. The brook was covered thick with a scum of ashes and charred brands, and the white belly of a fish shone out amid the dark wreckage. All the little friendliness of the place was gone. The kindly maple was but a black skeleton, with a mass of greyish ashes at its foot where the flame-colored and golden leaves had been. But, in spite of the dreariness, Theodore was not without hope. The imminent danger was past; Reid was unmistakably better; they still had some food and the brook would guide them from the wilderness when they could move.

Strange as it seemed, the immersion in the icy waters of the brook and the prolonged steam

bath on the hot ground had marked the turning point of Reid's illness. He showed no more signs of delirium, his fever was gone and his appetite had returned. He ate all that Theodore gave him and complained with mock bitterness at its meagre amount. But Harding had other reasons aside from his friend's health to urge him to restrict the meals. So much of the flesh had been spoiled by the fire that comparatively little remained. The trout, never eager, now struck but rarely at the gaudy flies. Theodore, himself, lived almost entirely on the dry and unnutritious fibres which remained from Reid's meat juice and broth, but still the supply was rapidly decreasing. Moreover, the outlook for game was most discouraging in this freshly burned territory.

Three cigars were left uninjured in the cigar case and these Theodore brought out one evening, and handed one silently to Reid. The latter took it, surprised, and rolled it tenderly between his fingers before lighting it. A sudden thought struck him.

"Have you saved that all this time, old man? Why didn't you smoke them to cheer you up? It must have been pretty blue."

"'All this time,'" quoted Theodore laughing. "It hasn't been years. But I did get mighty

blue sometimes. And the worst of it all was you kept saying such things. You came near breaking me all up, time and again."

"Why, what did I say?" Reid asked quickly in natural apprehension.

"Oh, poetry, most of it. Some of it wasn't so bad, but a good deal of it was the most doleful stuff. There was a lot about a fellow named 'Thyrsis,' or something of that sort, and a tree. And you kept saying over a lot of stuff about the sea of faith, and a melancholy roar. I don't know why, but it took the starch all out of me. I guess 'twas your tone more than anything else."

"Matthew Arnold?" and Reid laughed weakly. "No, I don't suppose he would be a great prop in an emergency. There's nobody like him, though."

"I should hope not," said Theodore unblushingly. There was a long pause as the two men smoked on in silence.

"It seems almost cozy here, now," said Reid at length. "I'm getting quite attached to the place; I shall hate to leave," and he laughed ironically.

"Speaking of leaving," Theodore said, "we've got to be thinking of it. We've got meat enough to last two days with economy, and one fish, and

about three-quarters of a gill of whiskey. Do you feel as if you could start tomorrow?"

"I could start, but I don't know how far I could get. Teddy, old man, you'd better go on by yourself. Then you can press ahead as fast as possible, without having to drag me, and send somebody back after me. See?"

"I'm not going to do it. We're going to stick together. It's safer, and it's far more cheerful. The only thing that bothers me is the chance that trying to move is going to hurt you. But I'm afraid there is no other way."

"How do you plan to strike?"

"I think our best chance is to follow the stream. We're sure of good water, and that counts for a good deal, dry as the woods are. It gives us our best chance for game, too. And didn't you notice on French's map that all the streams run south?"

"If you would only start without me, Teddy," Reid protested.

"I shan't, and that's all there is about it."

Reid reached over and laid his hand on Theodore's knee.

"Do you know you're a brick, Teddy?" he said fervently. "Most fellows would have struck off for help instead of sticking by."

"Nonsense!" said Theodore abashed.

"It isn't nonsense; you saved my life, and I'm going to have a chance to say so. It's a matter of some consequence to me if it isn't to the world at large."

"Don't be a fool," said Harding bluntly. "You had the hardest part of it, anyway. I didn't do anything. There wasn't anything that I could do."

"I know all about that. I've been tended like a baby, haven't known anything of the care and anxiety. I have had the best, — the most there was — to eat. I know something about it. I tell you, Teddy, I haven't deserved to be treated so."

Harding writhed uncomfortably under Reid's thanks and his allusion to the differences that had overshadowed their friendship of late. It seemed to the simpler, less analytic mind that any shadow of misunderstanding had been swept away as effectually as the fire had licked up the dry maple leaves. He would rather the matter should vanish forever in the rush of the flames. But Reid was launched now on his subject and was not to be stopped. The dusk of the night, the faint plash of the stream, and the aroma of the cigars all unsealed the wall of reserve between the two.

"It made me feel mean to lie there and have

you do all those things for me, while I had been standing in your way for a year back. She ought to have seen that you were a better fellow than I, and I suppose she did. Only there seemed to be a sort of fascination between us. She wouldn't marry me, Teddy, and I couldn't her, if I wanted to. This is all I've wanted to say about it. I've seemed like a sneak and I've been one, more or less. But I guess I haven't been as big a one as I've seemed. At any rate I made up my mind sometime ago that I wouldn't stand in your light if I could help it. You're one of the few fellows in this world who deserve to get what they want."

"Oh, shut up, Frank!" Harding groaned, pained alike at his companion's praise and at the necessity of canvassing the subject at all. "Don't let's talk about it any more. It's her place to choose — and the one that gets left has got to stand it the best he can, that's all. It's a pity if we can't be friends in spite of it."

But Reid had begun to arraign himself and took a gloomy pleasure in making out a strong case.

"If it had been like that, — yes. But I knew all the time that I couldn't marry her. It would take an independent fortune to do that. I was only experimenting and so was she, and I ought

to be kicked for it. I did try not to, but she fascinated me."

"I won't listen to another word, Frank. We're good friends now whatever happens," and Harding flung his arm over the other's shoulder.

Just as dusk was falling, two days later, a party of searchers from French's stumbled upon the two men they were hunting for. Dishevelled, red-eyed, torn, grimed deep from the burnt wood, and so weak that they could hardly stand, they were stumbling along half-consciously. Still the stronger of the two supported the weaker and carried the two rifles, even then shining with care, slung over his shoulder. Amid congratulations, rejoicings and explanations the two men were borne back to the warmth and rest and plenty of the hostelry.

CHAPTER XVIII

The treasurer of the American had come on from New York to talk with Mr. Harding, and was seated with his host by the big open window of the library. The air floated in warm and just tinctured with smoke as of forest fires. The November night was very quiet save for the cricket's tireless chirp and the sighing of the wind in the pines. Burkhardt's thin, dry face was furrowed with thoughtful wrinkles; his eyes narrowed as he spoke,

"We've got to formulate some plan to lay before the directors next Monday." The annual meeting of the American was at hand.

"Are you sure we can't weather it all right on the present basis?" Mr. Harding asked, without much hope of an affirmative answer.

"I don't see how. I've done all I can, even to counting pennies. But what does five hundred or even five thousand dollars amount to with a

concern like this," Burkhardt answered a trifle impatiently.

"One thing is sure," Mr. Harding said with decision. "We must not pass our dividend if it can be avoided. We can't have public confidence disturbed and a slump in American shares." He had thought out the problem through wakeful hours and knew the shoals and dangers along the course too well.

"Oh, we can declare the dividend, and then — there are certain retrenchments which we can make. We can scale down wages and cut the price we pay for raw material."

"Any rise in selling prices is out of the question, now?" Mr. Harding commented gravely.

"Yes; if the opposition goes to underselling us it will get as much of our market as it can supply — and by the way, Harding, how much do you think there is in the opposition?"

"Not nearly as much as the newspapers make out," Mr. Harding answered eagerly. "There's no organization; only some little correspondence among the independent firms and agreement as to certain details."

"Somebody said that the Harding mentioned in connection with it so often was your son." Burkhardt's tone was casual but his glance was

keen. He felt that many important questions hinged upon this point.

"Theodore Harding is my son, but he is in no sense the head of the opposition," Mr. Harding answered quietly. "I doubt if it has a head. The sensational newspapers have seized on the matter and made a great deal more of it than the case warrants."

"But your son is really running a mill outside the combine?" the treasurer asked quickly.

"Yes." Mr. Harding's tone was coldly non-committal.

Burkhardt puckered his thin, dry lips and looked at his companion. Mr. Harding's whole face showed the pain and humiliation beneath the would-be indifference. His companion only said quietly,

"Of course that complicates matters."

"It should not." Mr. Harding spoke more freely before this man's reticence. "I am not in a position where I can in conscience let family ties stand in my way. It is our duty to do the best we can for the interests intrusted to us. I warned my son when he entered into this business what he must expect if he stood in the path of progress. If he suffers I shall suffer, too, but I shall know how to make it up to him in the future."

"Spoken like a Spartan," said Burkhardt with a relieved sigh. He felt instinctively that praise was sweet to Mr. Harding and was ready with his offering. "It's a great relief to me that you see things in this light. It is a case of the greatest good of the greatest number. If the boy is headstrong, a lesson will do him good. At any rate we cannot treat lightly the responsibility which we have undertaken."

It was gratifying to Mr. Harding's self-love to have his resolution justified on lofty grounds. He turned back to the discussion of business with new courage.

"I am sorry that a cut in wages is inevitable but I see no alternative," he said more cheerfully. It eased his mind a little that the suggestion had come from his colleague, though he himself had long feared its imminence. He had a genuine regret that this experiment should bear hard at its outset on those least fitted for such a burden. He knew in a theoretical, bookish way that the life of the workingman was hard. He disliked to impose additional burdens, and he disliked to stand before the public as an oppressor of the poor. He recognized both motives; luckily he did not balance one against the other to test their respective weight.

"How big a cut will it have to be?" he asked reluctantly.

"A big one. I've been figuring on twenty per cent." Burkhardt's tone was business-like, with no trace of sentiment.

"Wages are uniformly high at present," said Mr. Harding, as if trying to brace himself for the measure. "Here in Underhill, you know, they beat us on the cut we tried for some eighteen months ago."

"What bothers me is the chance that they'll strike," Burkhardt continued.

"They won't strike," Mr. Harding responded confidently. "We are too strong, or they think we are, which amounts to the same thing."

"It's a time for desperate measures, anyway. We can't halt at a chance."

"Of course it will only be a temporary scale down," Mr. Harding went on, reassuring himself. "The combine cannot fail to put up wages in the end."

"That has been the unfailing tendency, of course. The workmen see enough to know that for themselves, or ought to." Burkhardt was soothing his superior as he might a nervous horse.

"There's no help for it, I suppose!" and Mr.

Harding sighed deeply. "But no one can know how unwilling I am to have it done."

"I can guess, Mr. Harding," Burkhardt's delicate sympathy answered. "Of course you stand in a relation almost patriarchal to your workmen. Any suffering — or apprehension, I hope it will really amount to nothing more — of course touches you closely and personally."

"I could never consent to it if I did not know that it was the best thing for them in the end. The collapse of the combine would bring frightful suffering. One has to judge of these things sometimes — even at the risk of misapprehension."

"The children of Israel murmured against Moses, you know," Burkhardt added quietly. "I can understand how hard it must be, though of course only partially. One who has had to do with money all one's life cannot really know what it means to have men depending on him, loving him. Wall Street isn't much of a place for the affections. Still I can understand."

Burkhardt's tact had struck the right chord. Mr. Harding liked to think of himself as a prophet-pioneer. Rankling words of Evans' along the same lines did not now come up to irritate him. He felt himself greatly soothed. He could not suppress a slight smile of gratifi-

cation at the allusion as he modestly changed the subject.

"And what else do you suggest in the line of economy?" he asked.

"Everything we can manage. Every little does help, of course, though I said just now it didn't. The money leaks away terribly. There's Badger's last bill, for instance."

He pulled a folded paper from his pocket.

"There's a chance for economy here," said Mr. Harding, scrutinizing the paper. "This is outrageous."

"It is pretty bad, but he has stood by us in some tight places — and we are paying for his reputation and all that."

"Some less expensive lawyer, with help in a tight place, might serve our purpose as well," Mr. Harding said tentatively. This point also he had considered.

"Can you suggest anybody? Someone who has sense enough to know when he is in a tight place?"

Mr. Harding hesitated.

"There is a young lawyer here in Underhill whom I have had my eye on for some time. He is my son-in-law, in fact. I have hesitated to suggest his name on that account. I don't wish to seem to be making the most of the advantages

which my position gives me in that way. But Oakley is so eminently sane in his views, and so entirely open to reason. He will be ready to do what he is told to without trying to mold things to his own views. He has given this branch of the law special attention, and is exceptionally clever. He is elected to the state legislature, however."

"That needn't hinder, need it?"

Just then the light footfall of a horse, trotting rapidly, came scurrying around the corner of the house toward the stable. A few minutes later a maid announced Mr. Burnham.

"He is my confidential agent in a great many matters where I don't wish to appear personally. He is not a man whom I should choose as a friend, but he is most useful. He may be able to help us out somewhat as to ways and means, though of course he is not altogether in my confidence." Mr. Harding wished to classify Burnham before his guest should meet him.

"I've been telling Mr. Burkhardt something about Oakley," said Albion Harding after the necessary presentations were over. "Perhaps you can confirm what I have said as to his ability."

"He's a smart fellow, smart as a trap. I've often wondered why you didn't let him in for

some of the good things the American is giving away. I sometimes think it would be cheaper to keep the laws than to pay a lawyer so much to help you break them safely."

Burkhardt flashed a swift, amused glance at Mr. Harding and noted the latter's black brows and twitching lips. The president of the combine answered a trifle sharply,

"I prefer to stick more closely to the truth and say that we pay a lawyer to help us keep the laws." Mr. Harding made the assertion so decidedly that there could be no doubt as to his belief in the truth of his statement. "Unfortunately, however, the other view seems to be the popular one," he continued. "The populace does not seem to realize that plain business men cannot be expected to look after and understand all the details of law — that they must have expert opinion. They apply their entirely ungrounded theory as to the general rascality of lawyers and imagine that we seek their help only in underhanded dealings."

"Badger has undoubtedly saved us from some bad slips," Mr. Burkhardt said pacifically.

"Yes, he has undoubtedly shown the American just how near the wind it can sail," Burnham retorted with a short, dry laugh. "You won't get anybody else who will give you such a feeling

of safety. I suppose you are talking over what to do with this opposition," he went on with an embarrassing directness. "It's going to work the dickens with the American," he finished, determined to fix the responsibility. Mr. Harding said nothing and Burkhardt rejoined easily.

"Oh, I don't think the opposition is going to count for much. We have everything in our favor, — money, a competent management, and the general business trend of the day. These things are hard to put down."

"There's one thing you haven't got, and that's public opinion," said Burnham bluntly. "The people are all with the opposition and against the combine."

"Suppose they are! How much does that amount to?" Burkhardt commented. "If they can get a trust-made article cheaper than they can get an opposition one they will buy it every time. It's all right for them to take out their disapproval in talk. It doesn't hurt us particularly, that I can see. As long as they buy our product they can talk as much as they like, as far as I am concerned."

"I must confess that I don't feel that way," Mr. Harding confessed. "The criticisms and accusations are undeniably hard for me to bear.

I am perhaps foolishly susceptible to public censure."

"I believe you there, Harding," said Burnham dryly. Then turning to Burkhardt, as if he found in him a congenial spirit, he continued, "They're making a good deal of talk over that Rutledge business, aren't they?" Burnham's own affairs had not been running smoothly of late and he took a malicious delight in irritating someone else.

"Rutledge? Rutledge?" Mr. Harding queried. His memory for names was not of the best. "I do not recall it for the time being."

"Rutledge? Oh, his was a common enough case," Burkhardt answered hastily, before Burnham could reply. "He declined a good offer for his business and behaved in a foolish manner generally. A mortgage was foreclosed on him and some notes fell due. He gave up and committed suicide. But I can't see the justice of blaming the American. Hadn't you heard?"

"Of course, of course. I hadn't heard of the suicide, however. How very shocking!" Mr. Harding's face was in fact a little white.

"It was shocking. But why the American should be held responsible is more than I can see. It was the man's own fault."

At length Burnham withdrew. He had eased

his mind of a certain amount of irritation and had planted another thorn in the garden of Mr. Harding's self-complacency. He could not regard his evening as altogether ill-spent. When he was at last gone, Burkhardt turned to Mr. Harding,

"What makes you put up with him?"

Mr. Harding was silent for a moment. He had no joy in the analysis of his motives nowadays; but at last the answer came in his quiet, reserved tones,

"Because I need him, I suppose. Perhaps because I cannot get on without him."

"Of course you know best. But I should hate to have a satyr like that always at my elbow, sneering at everything I did."

"He is irritating, but he relieves me of details in an admirable way. He is not openly connected with the American, and so can move with less circumspection. But he has everything invested there, so it is for his interest to do faithful work and not to talk."

"I can see that it is convenient to have an agent with those qualifications, but it is a pity that he can't be a gentleman at the same time."

"He has qualities that make up for that," Mr. Harding went on apologetically. "He is quick at catching the general scheme of what you

want done and at devising means. Moreover, he is willing to do a certain amount on his own initiative and willing to bear the blame if it will benefit the combine. It has been of incalculable value on several occasions for me to be able to deny any knowledge of certain matters. You can't expect everything in one man."

After he had shown his guest to his room, Mr. Harding went downstairs once more and paced up and down the veranda. He hated the thought of the cut in wages. It could not fail to create disaffection in the ranks of the combine, and it would make the course of the opposition shine more brightly by contrast. Theodore's popularity would grow apace while his father fell steadily in the popular esteem.

He knew that it would be impossible for the American to justify itself. The public at large would not readily believe that the big combine, incorporated but a year before with such éclat, was already in financial straits. It would be equally incredulous if informed that the cut in wages and the price of raw material were but temporary measures. Moreover, it was impossible to give such explanations, calculated as they were to unsettle the market.

A trust had been placed in his hands; should they not prove worthy of it? It would mean his

personal ruin if the American should fail, but that consideration counted for little with him. It would mean the ruin of so many others. It would mean that the plan and aim of his life had failed. His wife's ample fortune would remain, their beautiful home, his rose garden, his monograph on Dante, his organ, but he knew that these quiet employments would fail to satisfy him then. The humiliation and pain of failure were already his for a bitter moment.

CHAPTER XIX

Francis Reid came back from the woods with his mind made up to withdraw gradually from his friendship with Margaret Favor. He had lost all taste for the sentimental trifling which, after all, had stood in his friend's light. That whole experience in the woods, with its forced recognition of the verities of life, had shaken his dreamy, faithless melancholy. Harding's simple, matter-of-fact courage, his ungrudging loyalty to one who had been in a degree his rival had roused the other to see himself in a new light. With the renewed strength that came to him after his illness, came also a strengthened belief in his old ideals, a resolution to take life more honestly and simply, to try to lay aside speculation for action.

Some talk which he had with Faith Ordway helped confirm him in this decision. They were skating on the river in the early twilight of

December. The west glowed red, reflecting itself in a delicate pink on the glassy surface of the frozen stream. The soft grey of elms and maples traced itself across the sunset, holding entangled, one pale horn of the crescent moon. Faith, flushed with the exercise, was really handsome, and had been unusually attractive that afternoon in her thorny freshness of speech. She had laughed at Reid's choicest sentiment and railed alike at his alternating gloom and optimism. She was nevertheless continually lapsing into moments of wholesome bitter-sweetness. At length, after some half-mocking rejoinder of hers, Reid said plaintively,

"Do you know, Faith, you haven't given me a decent word for a desperately long time?"

"You probably haven't deserved it, then. I'm a very just person."

Reid changed the subject abruptly.

"I never saw you look so handsome, Faith."

"Oh, I'm not handsome!" she said carelessly. "Only sometimes a little good-looking. I wish I did always look as well as I do sometimes — like Miss Favor. She is the despair of my life — she is so exquisitely dainty. No wonder Mr. Harding is in love with her."

"Poor old Teddy, — I'm afraid he hasn't

much show. They have so little in common. That isn't a good outlook for a happy marriage."

"No, I suppose it isn't," said Faith, with a touch of reticence in her voice. This discussion of general principles did not seem to interest her, and she spoke of the particular once more.

"I have always wondered why she didn't care for him. When anyone is so nice and faithful he ought to be rewarded," she went on a little wistfully.

"Teddy is all of that, but he isn't deep. I don't know that it is for his happiness any more than for hers. And I'm not sure that I want to see him 'rewarded,' as you say," Reid spoke with much of his old flippancy.

"For personal reasons?" she asked, looking at him keenly.

"Perhaps," his tone was light but expressed some hidden puzzle.

"For mercy's sake, don't you know?" she retorted sharply. "I would be ashamed to own it."

"There you go jumping on me again, Faith. No, I don't know. It's only in novels that a man can always tell just whom he loves most and when he began to do it. You're too exacting. I never was in love. Tell me just how anyone ought to feel."

"How should I know?" she parried.

"You spoke with such certainty."

"Did I? Well, I like to see a man know his own mind. Mr. Harding doesn't seem to have any doubt about whom he loves." Reid thought the lightness sounded a little forced.

"Oh, well, Teddy and I are quite different. Things are always coming up to puzzle me and set me back. You're not fair. You get on some new gown or other that turns my head and takes my breath away and then begin to ask leading questions."

"You made me ask it," she flashed back at him.

"Did I? Do you know you are jolly good fun when you are angry, Faith? I believe I think you are more interesting than Miss Favor, after all."

Reid was quizzing the girl, flirting with her mildly. He had a sense of having gone too far in his last remark, but it was with a decided shock that he heard her next words.

"Do you know, sometimes I don't like you at all?"

"What do you mean, Faith," he stammered. "I thought we were old friends and good ones."

"I don't know quite what I do mean. Only

you've disappointed me so." There was a quiver of genuine feeling in her voice.

She paused a moment as if waiting for an answer, and Reid said,

"Oh go on, let me hear it all."

"I don't know that there is any more. You said Theodore Harding wasn't deep, and you never said a word about how simple and kind and good in every way he is. No, Mr. Albion Harding is the kind of person you prefer. He has brains enough, I admit, but he hasn't a single thought for anybody but himself." Faith's blue eyes were flashing with a wholesome intolerance.

"All that you say about me is probably true, Faith," Reid said stiffly. "But at least do me justice. Be fair. You said that Teddy was faithful and nice, or something of that kind, and I said he was all that, but he wasn't deep. Faith, you're way off, if you think I don't appreciate Teddy. I'm under such obligations to him as I'm not likely to be to anyone else in the course of my life."

Something in the solemnity of his tone surprised her.

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked abruptly.

"Hasn't he told you about it? But of course he wouldn't. He didn't want me to tell anyone,

so you mustn't. He saved my life up in the woods. We got lost, you see, and I was sick and out of my head, and he stood by me, like the little brick he is."

Then he told the whole story, as they glided on together in the twilight, his voice breaking once or twice, and ended, "Now don't accuse me again of not valuing Teddy. He's the best fellow, way through, that I know. He has his faults, I suppose. He's peppery when he's roused, and he gets roused more than occasionally, but he's true blue. He's worth so much more than I am that I've no right to set myself to estimating him anyway."

"You mustn't talk that way about yourself, Frank," Faith said gently. The little story had made her like both its hero and its teller better than before.

"And so I've disappointed you?" Reid continued. "It hurts me to think so. Your good opinion is very dear — very essential to me."

"I suppose I had no right to say what I did," Faith responded with late compunction.

"You had every right that years of friendship can give — and I admit your charges. I know I'm not living out my life as I planned it. Theories are always modified by conditions, I know;

but I'm afraid I haven't kept up to my ideals as I might have done."

"That's just what I mean," Faith interposed a trifle apologetically.

"It isn't a pleasant thing," Reid went on reflectively, "to have your tastes and ideals change in that way and be fully conscious of it. That comes of being introspective. If one isn't, there isn't half the pain about an inevitable thing like that."

"Why is it inevitable?" Faith queried.

"How can it be anything else while life is what it is? You start out, not knowing the world, expecting to be always true to yourself, and always to find others so. You think you can stem the current and stand for an ideal life whether any one else does or not. Then you find you can't. You find the world isn't what you thought it was, that you yourself aren't what you thought, and everything goes to pieces. You lose your incentive when you lose your belief in yourself. And then you get so you don't care, except now and then. That's a little tragedy, and the higher your hopes and aspirations were, the more of a tragedy it is."

"The tragedy lies in saying it is inevitable. One of the things that I remember best about

the old days is that you were always believing in people."

"But I'm not altogether to blame, Faith. I've seen a good deal of the seamy side of life in the last five or six years. Newspaper work and business don't foster a belief in the best side of human nature."

"Nor seeing too much of Mr. Harding," said Faith, bluntly. "If he was just a common money maker there wouldn't be any danger for you; but he's everything, — scholar and musician, and philanthropist and religionist, and so many things that you can't see the other thing that he is."

"I shan't ask you what that other thing is. I know by the way your eyes flash that it isn't anything complimentary. You know you and I can never agree about Mr. Harding."

"I wish you would leave him and go back to journalism," said the girl abruptly. "He isn't good for you."

Reid looked at her a little surprised, so well did her suggestion harmonize with his desires.

"I've been thinking of doing that very thing, Faith. Not for the reason you give exactly, but for some others. You see I hate to be mixed up in this business against Teddy and your father. It looks as if I were taking sides against

them. Teddy realizes that I'm not, but your father has a grudge against me. You can see that yourself."

"It isn't so much that you are Mr. Harding's secretary as that you believe in him so entirely," Faith explained eagerly.

"I don't suppose I should give up a chance like this if I meant to make business my life-work. But I don't. I see more than ever that I don't want to settle down to it. I'm getting restless and discontented." He hesitated a moment. "And there's another thing, Faith, — this is in confidence. I don't like the way the American is being run in some ways. You know more or less about it. Everybody does, and I will say this. I know that Mr. Harding isn't personally responsible for most of the things that have been laid to him lately. The only trouble is that he can't hold the thing. Circumstances are pushing him along a way where he doesn't want to go. But I don't know that I want to go too, on a good many accounts."

"Have you any opening in mind?"

"I heard the other day that McLeod is going to leave the 'Criterion.' That berth would just suit me."

"Do you know Mr. Barker? He owns it, doesn't he?"

"Yes, I know him. I've done more or less work for the paper ever since I came here. I could do more with the paper than McLeod ever has," Reid added, with the assurance that always came to him in his chosen field. "In journalism I might be able to make you proud of me some day — once more." He laughed dryly. Faith's criticism had hurt him more than he cared to let her see.

"I'm sure you could, Frank! That's just the trouble. You could so easily be all you ought to be."

"And meanwhile can't we swear a new friendship on a new basis without any illusions? The old days are very pleasant to remember, Faith. I never had so true a friend. But I can look ahead and see even better ones, founded on a truer knowledge and understanding of each other. Can't you, dear?"

Reid's tones were tender as if with something more than friendship, but they failed to move the girl to any feeling of response. Reid's true friend she would always be, with a friendship such as few women are capable of; but as she had come to know Theodore better, and had learned to admire his simple manliness, her childish, uncritical admiration for Reid had waned. Theodore brought her into touch with vital expe-

riences and sought her coöperation in practical matters in a way which delighted her.

Underhill was already suffering in premonition from the cut in wages. Twilight lasted longer and lamplighting came late in the thriftier homes; meat grew less frequent in the dinner-pails which journeyed each morning to the mill. Mothers turned and patched again little garments already condemned as past repair. At the best of times there had been no great surplus for pleasure or for hoarding among the common operatives. Now with a big decrease in wages privation stared them in the face.

This state of things prevailed throughout the country wherever the American held sway. The anti-trust mills, however, were running full time and paying full wages. Their selling price stood unchanged; they were said to be purchasing their raw material at the old rates, and they turned out weekly an even product.

Public sympathy now, of course, went with the firms outside the combine. Theodore in particular had gained in favor from his father's unpopularity. Ordway was not as popular among the workingmen of Underhill as was his younger companion, for he lacked Harding's simple friendliness and cordiality. He illustrated, however, the fact that a workman could rise to be a

mill-owner, and so increased the self-respect of the onlookers; and he was esteemed and honored in the city which had seen his toiling years. His justice, his unfailing kindness, his unassuming recognition of his past, all won him a quiet respect and affection, no less sincere than it was devoid of the enthusiasm which Theodore aroused.

The names of the two men, so unlike in training and character, came to be coupled together continually, and they had in fact grown very close together. The young man had come to take a place almost like that of a son with the older one. With Faith, too, he grew more friendly. The two had united in a plan for opening a cheap but wholesome eating house, and Theodore was daily surprised and delighted with Faith's executive ability. Mrs. Ordway's little kitchen answered at first for the baking and brewing and boiling which went on industriously; but the neat room on River Street attracted more and more people to its hospitality. Children came, with pennies clutched tightly in dirty little palms, and held out their pitchers to be filled with soup. The brown loaves of graham bread and shining sheets of buns gradually superseded the products of the bakery near by, in many homes. Soon the little restaurant moved into another building, where a basement kitchen with big range and

boilers offered better facilities for the increasing work. Faith gradually added the cheaper meats to her bill of fare, and her baked beans and brown bread became famous.

One stormy night in early March, Theodore accepted her invitation to sup with her. The room was cozy, with its windows full of geraniums, and its little fire. Perhaps, too, the gracious, womanly hostess lent it a little of its charm. They had talked for a time in the eager, interested way into which they always fell, when Faith said,

"Other people are beginning to come. What shall I do?"

"I don't see how we can have them. What sort are they? I don't mind giving them a cheap, good lunch. Some of them need it as much as the mill hands, no doubt; but you see it will crowd out the ones we started it for."

"Unless we enlarge the business. The room next this is for rent. We could have a door cut through and we could have two sets of lunches and prices. We could issue tickets to the mill people, and others would have to pay higher rates. Of course we can't furnish lunches at cost to all Underhill." Faith planned rapidly and eagerly.

"The point is you are working altogether too

hard already. You scarcely have a chance for anything you want to do."

"This is just what I want to do. I was always wild to do something. You know I wanted to study nursing. No, don't worry about me. I'm perfectly happy."

"I'm glad of that; and if you are there's no need, on that score, for you to open another restaurant. But anyway, you are not going to tire yourself all out."

"All right," said Faith meekly. It was not altogether unpleasant to have the man opposite assume the right to dictate her actions. "Only," she added, trying to smile lightly, but scarcely succeeding, "only, when the American swallows us all up together I shall open my restaurant as a money-making concern."

"When that time comes we will talk it over. But meanwhile I shan't countenance anything of the sort. Do you know, I sometimes think you are the finest girl I ever knew," continued Harding in blunt compliment.

"You forget Miss Favor," she said, smiling mockingly.

"Oh no, I don't," the young man answered in literal fashion. "I've remembered her more than usual lately." Then, seeing her puzzled look, he added,

"Why, haven't you heard?"

"No, — what?"

"She is engaged to Senator Blickenstrom. You know she is in Washington this winter. That's why I said I had been thinking about her more than usual. It set me to thinking, you know; and I've about decided that I don't care if she is. Funny thing, isn't it?" and Theodore laughed a little.

"But isn't it very sudden?"

"Oh, she has known him for a long time, but I never guessed at anything of that kind between them. I don't think there was until this winter."

"Mr. Rubinovitch was in here yesterday," said Faith abruptly, breaking a pause that had suddenly fallen. "What is the matter with him?"

"Somebody was saying the other day that he drinks; but I don't really think it is so. I haven't seen him lately. He never comes around any more. A year ago he always used to be dropping in at the mill."

"He is very clever, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's a genius; but I'm coming to think he isn't well-balanced. He has all sorts of wild notions about socialism and communism, and things of that sort. He has explained them all to me time and again, but I couldn't seem to

make much sense of them. At any rate I don't remember them now."

They lingered long over their homely supper, mindful of the coming and going about them as in a pleasant dream. From the midst of their conversation Faith was directing the business of the room, giving commands now and then to the woman who was waiting on the tables. Inside the fire crackled and the lamps burned cheerfully; without the storm howled, rattling the sleet sharply against the window-panes.

At length Harding rose reluctantly to go.

"I'll be in at eight — it was eight you said, wasn't it? to take you home. It's snowing and blowing like everything," was his farewell.

CHAPTER XX

Albion Harding was a man by whom anniversaries were scrupulously remembered. His thoughts were full of the happy past rather than the anxious future, as he walked up the hill to dinner one January night. He had dismissed the carriage which his wife had sent for him an hour earlier, and had lingered long over puzzling columns of figures. Now, at length, the yearly statement of the missionary society of his religious denomination was complete, and he was free to think.

He was glad to leave the present for the past. That date marked the beginning of the happiest days of his life. Thirty years ago that night he had been married, twenty-nine years ago his son had been born. He thought of his return from the continent, disappointed and disheartened, leaving, as he thought, all the best of life behind him to take up dutifully his dying father's be-

quest. He had found there, in the city of his birth, an occupation more absorbing than music, and a love which would have glorified even drudgery.

That love had not faded as the years went on. Mr. Harding had never for a moment been disloyal to his wife. She had been even dearer to him than his children. The sturdy, black-eyed boy, the tiny girl trilling about the house with her little bird-like voice, had been her gifts to him. The love which they exacted had only increased that which he had given her.

As the children had grown older and had asserted their individuality, the harmony between husband and wife had been accentuated. Mrs. Harding was not lacking in strength of a certain sort, but it was entirely under her husband's guidance. He was, himself, in a union different from the usual one of husband and wife. This very passivity of hers had kept up the illusion of their honeymoon. All a woman's duties she had fulfilled to perfection, even that of keeping her youth and beauty. She had given her husband a clear, steadfast devotion which accepted his word as law and did no independent thinking. A wife with a strong will and opinions of her own would have jarred on Mr. Harding's mas-

terful spirit, while one who submitted for the sake of peace would have irritated him no less.

As he climbed the veranda steps he saw his wife seated in a low chair by the fire. Something in the listlessness of the figure told him that she was lonely. He realized anew, with a remorseful pang, how empty the great house must seem to her with both children gone. His words of greeting spoke his thought.

"Have you been alone all day, dear?"

"No, Theodore was up to lunch, and I spent the afternoon with Althea. She looked a little better, I thought, but she tires so easily."

"The roses came all right," he said, glancing at the big bunch of American Beauties that drooped from their transparent glass over the dusk of the library table.

"Yes," she answered softly. "I have not missed them on this day for twenty-nine years. What lovely ones! We have had none so fine of our own."

"It doesn't seem thirty years, does it?" he queried. "Thirty years is a long time. It would almost seem that we must be getting old; but you do not look five years older than the girl I married."

"Are you a flatterer, or growing very blind?" she smiled. "My hair is getting quite grey, and

you don't half know how hard I've been fighting wrinkles for the last fifteen years."

"A winning fight, then," he answered playfully, as he stroked her smooth cheek.

"I have done my best."

"In everything, and your best has been perfection. I wish I could say as much. I'm afraid, Evelyn, I have not been what I should to you, especially of late. I have been so worried, so absorbed and busy, and away so much of the time. I have not realized as I should have done, how lonely it must have been for you. I was thinking, as I came up the hill, that I have estranged you from the things you care for most. Has it been my fault, I wonder, that my son and daughter have both been rebellious? I sometimes think that I may have erred in some way with Theodore and with Althea."

He paused to hear his wife's eager protest, but she was silent and he went on more slowly.

"But I have made many advances to Theodore. I bore a great deal."

He paused again for comment. Mrs. Harding said, with obvious effort, her delicate face flushing:

"You have borne a great deal, Albion; but you must remember that Theodore is young and impetuous."

"Impetuous, I grant, but he is a man — twenty-nine today." Mr. Harding's tone was not over-tolerant.

"He is really younger than that. He has been trying, I admit. But he has not the self-control which you have — he will never have it. Can't you make up with him, Albion?"

"What can I do? He has deliberately embarked on this project. If I could not dissuade him at the start, what can I do now? I cannot withdraw from my position, he will not from his. How could I, Evelyn? There are millions of dollars besides my own embarked in it."

"Are you sure that you cannot withdraw, Albion? I don't know about it, of course," she added eagerly, as she saw the frown coming between his brows. "I realize that it is too complicated for me. But if you could let it go! Someone could take your place, and we could go back to the old happy times."

"But we cannot, Evelyn," he answered decidedly. "It would only bore you to listen to the reasons; but I will tell you, in the deepest confidence, that the American is in difficulties, pressing financial difficulties. I don't wish to arrogate too much to myself, but I have taken the initiative in it throughout. It would be a dangerous experiment to change leaders just now.

Besides, we could not go back to the old happy days. Althea is ours no longer, and Theodore — can you expect that things can ever be quite the same between us? The boy has defied me — has shown plainly his willingness to do me positive harm."

"He is only doing what he thinks is right. He has told me how he feels. Of course he should realize that you have far greater experience, and are better fitted to decide. But he doesn't mean to be undutiful, I am sure of that." Mrs. Harding performed the somewhat difficult feat of remaining loyal to both parties in the struggle.

"Then he is behaving very strangely. I am willing to meet him half-way in any reconciliation. If he will give up his plans all shall be as it was before. But the advances must come from him."

"Albion, do more than that, for my sake! Remember, I have given everything to you and our children. I haven't been like some women, only half a wife, half a mother. I didn't have their temptations, I never cared for the other things. My home was always my greatest interest. But sometimes I think I have been rewarded in this way, Albion — that we are more one than most married people. I think I have never asked

you for anything in all my life before, which you have refused me." She was putting her whole heart into the appeal.

"And I do not refuse you this, Evelyn. I will do what I can in honor. But there is a limit to what one's own dignity allows one to concede. It isn't altogether a question of preference. I might prefer a reconciliation on any terms, and yet not feel justified in bringing it about at a compromise. But I will go to him, and will do all I can to make him see the right."

"Are you sure it is the right, Albion?" Mrs. Harding asked with questioning eyes. She was not used to doubting her husband's judgment, but this was involuntary. "Sometimes it looks the other way to me. These things are very confused, but if it should be all wrong?"

Mr. Harding did not answer. He was tired. He told himself that he could not explain it clearly enough for her. He might fail to make her see that he was seeking the good of others, and only incidentally his own gain,— through contumely and malignity, a martyr to his industrial ideals. He was very weary of self-justification, of the endless cudgelling of his brain for excuses. He only added a word of warning that he might not raise her hopes of a reconciliation too high.

"I must caution you, Evelyn, not to expect too much. Such an attempt is well-nigh useless. I am only making it to prove to you that I am not indifferent to your wishes. I hope for nothing from it. The matter has gone too far to admit of any such simple settlement."

Albion Harding awoke that night after a brief, unrefreshing sleep. The moonlight filled his room. Through the open door he could hear his wife stir uneasily, and then knew by her soft, regular breathing, that she slept soundly once more. In the utter stillness of the house he alone was restless, harassed, wakeful. He had never known until lately these midnight panics where the perspiration stood cold upon his forehead at the thought of the future. The consolations which he could bring to his aid were of little use to him after all. Failure, even if it entailed no actual deprivation to himself and his, was a humiliation which he could not bear to think of. He turned fiercely to preventive measures. He would not fail. The time was past when the American could give quarter; and now, providentially, the ruin of a rival seemed much more a matter of course than it had done a year ago. The president of the big corporation had all an adept's impatience of a bungler to help

him harden his heart. He was so sure that he could, through his subordinates, manage these manufactories better than their owners, that it had come to seem well-nigh legitimate to take them by force. Then, he argued with himself fiercely, they had been given every opportunity to come in on generous terms — many of them, at least. He grew more relentless as he pondered on their ingratitude.

His anger was most active against the opponents whom he met daily on the streets. Ordway he dismissed with a scornful smile; he had heard but yesterday that the conservative man had been borrowing heavily, and knew that only desperate straits would drive him to that measure. But Theodore — he held his breath as if the thought even might disturb his wife in the next room. How should he be dealt with? Burnham and Burkhardt, who represented two widely different standpoints, were agreed on this matter. Adversity would not harm his son. Even in thought Mr. Harding did not say to himself what must be done, in case his embassy of reconciliation should fail.

He awoke unrefreshed, with grey face and sunken eyes, and after a weary pretence at breakfast took his way down to his son's mill, deter-

mined to have the useless interview over as soon as possible.

All looked prosperity at the factory. Big drays were unloading before a side building, the even thunder of machinery came through the windows open to the mild winter air. Mr. Harding entered the main door and walked slowly down the central passage between the machinery. The faded women had on their faces a little more of hope than usual, so he thought. There were hints of attempts at improvement here and there. Factory life had lost a little of its sordid aspect.

He climbed the stairs to his son's room, following a curt word of direction. He rapped and was confronted by a startled face. Theodore's first thought was that only some ill tidings of his mother could have brought his father there. Where Mrs. Harding was concerned, when she was present, the two men met in a fashion more friendly than of old, the elder dissembling his outraged feelings, Theodore friendly in truth. Elsewhere, however, Mr. Harding usually vouchsafed his son nothing more than a polite greeting. Theodore's first word was therefore a question.

"Mother? Is she well?"

"Yes, your mother is well, Theodore, don't be alarmed. I come from her — an ambassador

from a high power," and he smiled at his own conceit. "Your mother thinks that if we do our best we may come to some ground of settlement of our difficulties. I must confess that I am not so sanguine —." He paused. There seemed nothing to say which had not been said already.

"Mother doesn't understand," said Theodore gravely.

"No, and I only promised because I could not bear to deny her. But if you could give up your schemes, Theodore?"

"It is just as hopeless as for me to ask you to give up yours," Theodore answered quietly. "I know I am not important, like you. I'm not a man of a thousand, one who can't be replaced. But what would you think of me — what could I think of myself — if I gave it up now?"

"And no offer that I can make will influence you? You shall have your own price for your factory,— within reason, I mean. Can I show my desire to be on good terms with you, my son, in any better way than this?" Mr. Harding's voice was very earnest.

"Father, I don't doubt that you want to be on good terms with me if you can. But don't you see that matters have gone too far for us to be anything but enemies in business? I hope we need not carry it outside."

"I hope not. But, Theodore, do you realize what it is all coming to — what it must end in?" Mr. Harding questioned.

"I suppose I know what you mean,— that I shall be ruined, unless you are willing to let us live on. Mind, I don't ask for any different treatment than you give the rest; but you have almost unlimited power. We don't harm you. You don't need to dread our competition. You say you can produce cheaper than we can. You can control the market, anyway. It's a simple proposition enough in one way. Just let us alone."

The young man's whole heart went into his plea. All the months of repression and silent struggle found vent at last in these few words. He waited, with eagerly parted lips, for his father's response.

But Mr. Harding was silent. He could not tell his son that the question was not so simple as it appeared. He could not explain that the big American did dread competition. He could not offer the justification for his action which was ready on his lips. Circumstances were strangely against this Moses of the industrial world. The fates, with grimly smiling lips, were playing strange tricks with him.

He sighed, and as he gazed at his son's eager, passionate face the glow died out of it.

"But of course you will do as you see fit. I have no right to suggest," the younger man added apologetically.

"I cannot do as you suggest, Theodore. The integrity of the American depends on a clear field. That is the very essence of the conception. I have the interests of my constituents to consider. And I must warn you if you persist — I cannot discriminate. You will do well, if you can bring yourself to it, to get rid of your business as soon as possible."

Mr. Harding's tone was full of meaning. Theodore looked his father full in the face and answered quietly:

"I think I know what you mean, father!"

The keen eyes sank under the look in the milder ones opposite. Albion Harding had many deeds of the combine on his conscience. Under the accusing gaze these rose up one by one to confront him, and were ready with their accusation. His hands clasped and unclasped nervously.

"I sometimes think I have blundered somewhere," he said slowly. "There must have been some mistakes. But it is cruel that for a blunder such punishment should come. I cannot even

explain myself to you. I cannot give my reasons. Only believe I have them, imperative ones. It is a hard problem for me as well as for you. I believe,— I believe I have done right. I have taken every step for the best, as I saw it. And if ever the time comes when you find it hard to believe this — when everything seems against me — remember, Boy, I have tried to do right."

The old familiar name of the days of his childish companionship with his father touched Theodore beyond measure. The eyes so like in color, so different in expression, met for a moment softened by tears, and Theodore stretched out his hand half-shyly to his father's.

CHAPTER XXI

Theodore ran blithely downstairs one March morning with his dog at his heels. The two were bound for breakfast and their healthy appetites hurried them. The keenness of the early air brought a delightful tingle to the face, and yet a promise that the noon would be warm. Between the near-by buildings the hills across the river showed softly brown, with here and there a laggard snow-bank flecking their sides. Theodore fancied that the snowdrops and crocus would be already starring the lawn up at home. The maple twigs showed swollen, knobby buds. The gossiping sparrows in the branches, constant winter citizens though they were, still seemed harbingers of spring.

Spring thoughts come to one on a morning like this. Theodore was wondering how long it would be before he could tempt the trout in distant pools. Dave bounded along, reconnoitering

every dark alley and by-way for cats, and jubilantly driving up flocks of sparrows and pigeons. The man's step rang out sharply in the deserted streets, the dog's sharp bark startled the echoes from the opposite buildings. The day was new, the year all promise.

Suddenly a chance word overheard on the street took all the brightness out of the day for Theodore. William Ordway had failed.

The news came to the young man as a great shock. He had been in New York for a week and had only reached home late the night before. This would account for the fact that he had heard no rumor that this was impending; but he realized remorsefully that Mr. Ordway had voluntarily spoken little of his affairs of late, and that he, himself, had not questioned. Had he known, he might have helped his friend to tide over the crisis, or he might at least have offered sympathy. He told himself gloomily that he had shown too little understanding of the strange, silent man's forebodings.

The cruelty of it all came over him as he gazed out of the window with his breakfast unfinished. This man had no interests outside the business where he had labored so ungrudgingly. Now these had been taken from him. And for what? Not in the inevitable business struggle for life,

not even to insure the existence of the American, not in the greed for money — somehow that would have seemed more legitimate than this; but in a cruel caprice. The man who prided himself on his dexterity with the organ was now finding the same delight in playing on men and states.

In an anger which admitted no thought of mitigating features, Harding took his way to the Ordways' little house. Mrs. Ordway was dusting the sunny, crowded living room, lifting the belongings, wiping them and putting them down as methodically as if there were no such things as trouble and failure in the world. But now and then a slow and unwilling tear found its way down her furrowed face. Her eyes were red and her whole face looked haggard and drawn. All Harding could say, as he took her plump hand in his, was:

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Ordway! I feel as if it were partly my fault. I'm sure I could have helped him in some way if I had only known."

"I asked him why he didn't go to you, but I couldn't git much out of him. He ain't one that talks much to women folks," Mrs. Ordway answered.

"I feel as if I ought to have known. I was a fool to need telling. I thought all along that

he was too gloomy, and lately he hasn't said anything. If I had only been at home when it happened, I might have been able to do something," Theodore went on self-reproachfully.

"Well, there ain't any use cryin' over spilt milk. What's done is done." There was silence in the room. The woman looked out of the window with dreary, red-rimmed eyes.

"I do' know what in the world we're goin' to do, Mr. Harding," she continued after a pause. "I ain't dast to ask him anything. He come in an' told Faithy and me last night an' then went right upstairs to bed, an' he seemed to be sleepin' all night. He didn't seem to want to talk, an' I ain't said anything. Do you suppose we owe much?"

"Of course I can't say, Mrs. Ordway," Theodore replied as cheerfully as he could. "You may not owe anything. Mr. Ordway may have property he cannot realize on at present. It sometimes happens that way, and he is a cautious man. He would hardly borrow heavily, or anything of that sort."

"I wonder if we'll have to sell the house. It's the first house we ever owned, an' all the things in it are so pretty. I do' know how I could bear to give it up. An' father is so proud of everything, too — an' here's the settin' room carpet.

I'm sure it wouldn't fit any other room, all cut up into jogs the way it is. I'm sure I do' know what we shall do about it." Mrs. Ordway wiped away the tears which flowed more freely now. The problem of the sitting-room carpet gave a concreteness to her affliction which made it more easy to realize and deplore.

Theodore sat listening to the lament. He knew with his sympathetic insight that neither Faith nor her father could talk over a trouble; and realized how hard the forced repression must be for Mrs. Ordway. All she needed was the look of pity in his eyes to draw her on to further speech.

"There's the stained glass window in the hall! I don't s'pose it made any difference, do you? Father didn't really seem to want it, nor the hardwood floor in the dinin' room, an' I kind of insisted. If I'd mistrusted I wouldn't have said anything about 'em, of course; but he ought to have explained. Well, all is, we'll have to go away an' leave 'em. I ain't blaming anybody, an' I don't want to make it any harder than 'tis for father, but it just seems as if I must talk to someone, an' Faithy ain't one of the talkin' kind."

She finished rapidly as the sound of steps was heard in the hall, and Mr. Ordway came heavily

into the room. He took Theodore's hand in a lifeless grasp and tried to smile in answer to the stammered words of sympathy. He made but sorry pretence, however, and sank wearily into a chair by the window.

"Mother, if you have any influence at all over this self-willed man, you will make him eat some more breakfast. All I could get him to take was a cup of coffee." Faith's tones were cheerful but her eyes were apprehensive.

"My head aches so I can't eat," Mr. Ordway answered.

"I feel angry with you, Mr. Ordway," Theodore said. "You should have told me how things were going."

"What good would that have done? You've got all you can tend to yourself. I'm sorry I couldn't stand by you better. I done my best, at any rate. I've given Albion Harding considerable trouble, an' he ain't done with it yet." There was still a ring of determination in the tired voice.

"You'll get your matters straightened out in a few weeks and then we'll sail in and smash the American," Harding answered with cheerful exaggeration.

"You can't rely much on me," Mr. Ordway answered wearily. "I guess, mother, I'll step

upstairs an' lay down. My head aches considerable."

"I do' know's Ellen's made the bed," Mrs. Ordway said helplessly. Her practical hold on everyday affairs seemed suddenly to have deserted her.

"I'll go and see to everything," said Faith cheerily. "Come on, father, a good long sleep is just what you need."

That day was the first of many long and anxious ones in Mr. Ordway's little house. Its master lay unconscious in a lingering fever. The tidings grew less hopeful as time passed. The sick man seemed wholly without strength or wish to rally, and made no fight for life. The two women waged the losing battle with no help from their patient, and grew daily more worn. Theodore never saw Mrs. Ordway. Faith sometimes answered his inquiries, with a white face that tried hard to be hopeful. It worried the young man to see them wearing themselves out for lack of the aid which they needed, and at last he spoke what was in his mind.

"You ought to have a trained nurse, Faith."

"I'm a trained nurse myself," she replied, trying to smile.

"That's all right. But you and your mother are getting all worn out, Faith. I'm not going

to let you get sick." He had tacitly assumed of late the right to care for the girl's welfare.

"Thank you for caring. But we must do as father would have wished. We don't know that we have anything at all. It would be different if it altered his chances. Then, of course, we should feel that extra expenses were justifiable. But we both know about nursing, and Dr. Rice says we are doing everything."

"At least have some woman not so expensive as a trained nurse, who will help you out and give you a chance to rest. I needn't tell you, Faith, that anything that I can do with money or any way to spare you — I owe you on my own account and my father's." The voice unconsciously dropped at the words: "Your father's money has been distributed in the dividends of the American. That's why you have no money."

"Don't, Theodore!" Faith said with tears in her eyes. "You didn't get any of the dividends, you're not responsible. If we really come to need help —." Her voice faltered. She could neither argue with him nor thank him; her tired brain refused the necessary words.

At last, one afternoon, Mrs. Ordway fainted at her husband's bedside, and Faith, with a double anxiety, sent for Harding. He searched Under-

hill through for a nurse, but in vain. Its little staff was all employed. When he returned, disheartened and unsuccessful, the maid opened the door for him with swollen eyes.

"Miss Faith's up with him. Poor man, the doctor told me there wa'n't no hope for him,—and him such a kind soul," and she burst into noisy weeping.

"Hush, Ellen, while there's life there's hope," Theodore said soothingly. "Do you suppose I could see Miss Faith a moment upstairs?"

He told Faith of his unsuccessful search and his hope that a nurse would come in the morning, and asked leave to share her watch. He was prepared for opposition but none came. Faith was so weary, so anxious about her mother, so numb with the great dread that hung over her, that she did not protest. Then, too, though there had been no spoken word of love between them, there was now the dependence of an unspoken affection.

Save for his care of Reid in the wilderness Harding had had no experience with illness. But he was deft and skilful. Soon he was taking charge of the medicine, nourishment and ice-packs, leaving Faith to attend to her mother, or snatch if possible some rest. She was at hand on a couch in the corner of the sick room, ready

to come to his assistance. Once he dropped a gay blanket softly over her, thinking she slept, only to see her eyes open and the faintest flutter of a smile pass over her quivering lips.

For the first hours of the night Mr. Ordway drowsed heavily, and no sound disturbed the quiet of the room, save the occasional movements of the nurse, or the soft purr of the fire on the hearth. But by and by the patient began to talk, brokenly at first, then more coherently as he gained an illusive strength.

The talk was all of business, with the cares and triumphs of early and later years strangely mingled in his delirium. Sometimes he was the day-laborer going to the morning's work in the factory, dinner-pail in hand; sometimes the mill-owner, fighting a losing battle against forces too strong for him; sometimes he was cheering his wife in times of adversity, sometimes talking to his workmen, or bitterly arraigning Albion Harding and corporate greed. Theodore sat watching the shadows of the night lamp and the wayward flickering of the firelight, and listened uneasily, half-guiltily to this reserved man's revelation of himself.

"Yes, Mattie," the monotonous voice rambled on, "some day we'll hev' a home of our own. I wish't we could have it now, before you're all

wore out workin' an' waitin' for it. I tell you, Faithy ain't goin' to want for things the way you hev' done. She's a good girl and a pretty one, an' she deserves better'n we can do for her. But there, so did you, an' you ain't got it yet. But you shall hev' it, never you fear —. Don't you put any meat in the dinner-pail today. I had it yesterday an' you need it mor'n I do any way, now. I tell you the baby ain't comin' into a very rich home, but it'll have enough some day —. Yes, I tell you, I'm goin' to own the mill some day. They's lots of men begun at the bottom an' worked up to more than that. An' now the old man's dead an' Albion Harding's comin' back from foreign parts. I wonder what kind of a manufacturer he'll make —. You can talk about Albion Harding all you want to, mother. It ain't always the man that speaks the most in prayer meetin' or gives the most money to colleges that's the best man. An' he's driven that woman — what was her name? Well, never mind what he did — you all know, everybody knows. He's a thief an' a murderer — just the same as —. You can talk about the combine an' all those things, but I tell you it's Albion Harding an' nothin' else."

The husky, broken voice went on with its charges, and the name of Albion Harding was

uttered over and over again, in tones of accusation and warning and fear.

"Yes, if Albion Harding ruins me — an' I don't see what's to hinder,— I shan't stay by to see it done. They'd be better off without me — mother an' Faith. I couldn't do anything for 'em. I'm too old to start fresh. They'd git on better if I was out of the way. My revolver's all loaded an' I wouldn't wait. An 'then, Albion Harding can know he's a murderer."

The voice rose higher and huskier in its accusation, and Theodore covered his face with his hands. It seemed that he could not stand longer the sound of those upbraiding tones with their note of terror, the sight of that flushed, distorted face. Suddenly Faith was kneeling by his side with her hand on his.

"Don't listen, Theodore, don't listen!" she said with a tender break in her voice. "He doesn't know what he is saying." Even her love and pity could not constrain her to say that it was untrue.

"It's all true," said Theodore shortly.

"You're not to blame!" she whispered. "You have been true and honorable throughout. You have tried to undo the harm he has done. You've done all you can."

He did not answer. He hardly knew or cared

for her words of comfort in the bitterness of his abasement. He let her hand unclasp from his, unnoticed in the depth of his sad thoughts. But he heard every word that the hoarse voice murmured in strange confirmation of the girl's words.

"No, if there ever was a gentleman, he's one. He's always done the honorable thing by me, an' if Faithy does care — do you really think she does, mother? — He'll make her a fine husband. His father's doin's ain't anything against him, if Faithy cares —"

Harding heard no more. He raised the girl's face and looked into the eyes that met his steadily, in spite of the wave of color that flooded the weary face.

"Is it true, Faith? *Do* you care?"

He saw that the quivering lips formed a half-articulate "Yes," and raised her face till their lips met.

It was a strange and unexpected betrothal, with the harsh voice of delirium in their ears, with the dread of the worst hovering over them. They clung together for a moment, and then Faith rose calmly and sought her mother.

With a swift thought, even in the midst of his new happiness, Harding opened the drawer in the little table at the head of the bed. There lay an

old revolver rusty and uncared for, but freshly loaded with cartridges which glinted bright and new in the firelight. He emptied the chambers and put the cartridges in his pocket, hoping that he had disarmed any suspicions which the words of the sick man might have aroused.

"No, I can feel very little hope," Dr. Rice said gravely, when he came at midnight. "He has been under a great strain which has sapped his vitality. There has been nothing in the disease itself to warrant such an ending, but he seems to have no wish to live."

"There is not much left for him to live for," said Harding sadly. "He was bound up in his business. It's the easiest way out for him."

The next afternoon when Harding called to inquire, the red-eyed maid told him that Mr. Ordway was dead.

CHAPTER XXII

Theodore knew that his engagement to Faith Ordway could only give his mother pain. He climbed the hill next day, dreading to tell her, yet eager to get the interview over. He was unmindful for the first time in his life of the plash of water and the spring music of birds. He tried to break the news gently, but the best that he could achieve was the blunt statement of the fact.

"Theodore, what have you been doing!" his mother asked sharply, a frown gathering on her smooth forehead.

"I have told you, mother. Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

"Why should I?" she said bitterly.

"Why should you ever congratulate a man?" was Theodore's quick response.

"But, Theodore, I thought you cared for Margaret?" There was a note of personal grievance in Mrs. Harding's voice.

"I thought I did, too, but that's all over now. Margaret is engaged to another man."

"But if you cared for her?"

"I never did as much as I thought. I know now. And it was broken off finally before she went to Washington. She knew best all the time," Theodore responded cheerfully.

"And you are ready to settle back into her class in life? You can't introduce her to the people you have always known," Mrs. Harding persisted.

"Why not? She has just as good manners and just as good an education as any of them. She may not know a few little wrinkles that come from practice, but you and Althea can put her on to them. About settling back to her class — I don't know what you mean. Her father is a manufacturer — *was* a manufacturer, and so is mine."

Mrs. Harding flushed and answered with dignity: "He was a common workman in your father's, in your grandfather's mill, wasn't he? Didn't you tell me that? He certainly talked like it. He called me 'marm.'"

"Well, he is out of your way — and father's, poor man. As for his being a common workman in my father's mill — I've been one myself. I've done everything from the commonest, dirtiest

work up. We're pretty even on that score, I should say."

"It was different for you, you didn't have to. You could stop whenever you wished."

"Yes, it was different. There's no particular hardship in a thing like that when you know it's only for a year or two. It is settling down to it for life that takes the grit. Mother, shall I tell Faith that you will call on her soon?" he added abruptly.

"Of course, Theodore; if you are determined to marry the girl I must be polite to her. But why are you going to do it? With so many pretty girls of your own set who would be glad to marry you?"

Theodore laughed wholesomely, not only at his mother's despairing tone, but at her partial estimate of himself.

"Just mention some of them, mother. They have never seemed anxious to. And about this matter of class,— Faith is a good deal more the sort of girl I want, and need, than these girls up here on the hill. Don't you know, mother, I never quite belonged with the rest of you? I'm more at home with the mill people and plain folks like the Ordways. They take to me more than the other kind, too. Margaret never thought I was good enough for her."

"Margaret was a foolish girl," said Mrs. Harding sharply. Margaret had not yet been forgiven.

"At any rate, mother, Faith and I are engaged." The subject of Margaret had no more interest for Theodore. "Can't you love her at first because I do? Later you will do it for herself. You don't know how wise and sensible she is. Let me tell you about the workman's restaurant down in River Street. Faith has run that."

"You told me about it," Mrs. Harding replied coldly. "But I should hardly have thought her mother would have let her do it. It was no place for a young girl among all those rough men."

"But, mother, she isn't a young girl."

"That has nothing to do with it. She should not have gone down there unchaperoned," Mrs. Harding replied severely.

"Her mother was often there," said the young man in discouraged tones, "and there were two women who worked there, and the men were always kind and respectful."

"It only shows, Theodore, how standards differ. She has been trained in a wholly different walk of life from yours."

Theodore made no response. He was too tired and discouraged for speech.

"Ought I to call on her before the funeral?" Mrs. Harding interrupted his thoughts.

"Oh, mother, I don't know the etiquette of the business. If you could go feeling like a mother to her, I should ask you to go now. But as it is, you would better wait until it is all over. Poor Faith!" and he sighed deeply.

Just then a step sounded outside and Mr. Harding entered the room. The smile faded from his face at sight of Theodore; his own conscience did not acquit him of some instrumentality in Ordway's ruin. He felt that his own skilful justification of himself would not appeal to his son. Burnham had interpreted freely certain liberties given him, and had precipitated the business trouble which the pressure of the American had rendered inevitable. Mr. Harding feared that his son would tell him of this. Theodore, on the other hand, was no more anxious for an interview than was his father, for he knew that he could not trust himself. He was moving toward the door after a quiet greeting when Mrs. Harding stopped him.

"You mustn't go, Theodore; your father will wish to hear your news."

There was an uncomfortable pause in which one waited for the other to speak. Finally Theodore said abruptly:

"Mother means my engagement to Miss Ordway."

Again there was silence. The clock chimed out five silvery strokes, the fire snapped, a bluebird outside trilled persistently. Mrs. Harding saw from the faces of the two men that she had made a mistake. She had relied too implicitly on the statement which Mr. Harding had made after his last interview with his son,— that they were friends in everything outside of business. She hastened to interpose.

"Theodore tells me that Miss Ordway is a very charming girl," she faltered.

"Theodore has certainly had opportunities for knowing," Mr. Harding responded coldly.

"A man usually has before he asks a woman to marry him," Theodore answered.

"And you really mean that you have let the matter come to this, Theodore?" Mr. Harding queried.

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

"I would hardly have thought Mrs. Ordway capable of so much finesse," Mr. Harding said deliberately.

"If you mean that she has brought this about you were never more mistaken in your life. She would have every reason to refuse her consent.

You can perhaps guess what I mean," Theodore replied hotly.

"I'm sure I don't see what objection Mrs. Ordway could possibly have, Teddy. I'm sure any mother might be glad to have you for a son," Mrs. Harding ventured pacifically. She trembled before the storm she had unwittingly raised.

Mr. Harding stood silent in terror of the accusation which he saw upon his son's lips. One person in the world still believed in him implicitly. It was something to go home quivering from the real thrusts and fancied slights of the day, to an atmosphere of unfailing love and trust. He felt that he could not relinquish the one balm which could restore the untroubled self-esteem of former years. He said hastily:

"We need not go into the matter of Mrs. Ordway's feelings, Theodore. They are after all immaterial. There are objections enough on our side without going farther. I suppose your mother has made plain to you how extraordinary this match is. Do you care nothing for what people of your own walk in life will say of it?"

"I'm not afraid that anything that I can do — even more disgraceful things than this — can do much harm to the family name. It has too many epithets of a certain sort tacked to it now to make

it a thing to be proud of. I should think you might realize that."

Theodore's face was white even to the lips, his eyes blazing. He stood for a moment looking full at his father, then, without a word, he left the room.

The two faces haunted Mrs. Harding even until the next day. Her long social experience stood her in good stead; and although righteous anger and convicted guilt were not common in her experience she recognized something of their value. Then there had been Theodore's harsh taunt as to the esteem of the family name. Why had Mr. Harding not refuted it? It seemed that, in whatever lay between them, Theodore was in the right and his father wrong. Evelyn Harding felt a strange, dull oppression of spirits, which the musical jangling of the bluebird and robin and sparrow among the swollen buds, and the joy of the spring sunlight could not dispel. At length she made a definite effort to shake off her depression, ordered her carriage and started to take Althea for a drive.

She found alleviation of her mood in her daughter's chatter. Althea was full of Oakley's projected trip to Washington and the fact that she was to accompany him. She was full, too,

of Theodore's engagement, and Mrs. Harding roused herself to decided warmth in Faith's favor by championing her cause against Althea. Mrs. Harding sometimes recognized the fact that Oakley's rapidly growing reputation was strongly influencing his wife. Money had been more plentiful in the little home since Oakley's connection with the American. His reputation for brilliancy and clearness of thought had grown throughout the term of the state legislature. Prosperity, it seemed, had come to stay. Althea had grown assured, daring, meddling a little in politics, echoing her husband with an original air that made people pronounce her clever. With returning health, too, she was fast approaching a brilliant, dainty beauty. Mrs. Harding could prophesy for her daughter a social future. And yet she left her at her door with a sigh of relief. The younger woman's assurance of success jarred upon her.

As she stopped at a little bookstore on her way home, the bold lettering on a magazine cover caught her eye. "Albion Harding, A Character Study." It was one of the lighter periodicals which she did not see at home, and she resolved to surprise Mr. Harding with it. She could fancy his laugh, half-amused, half-satirical.

The frontispiece was a copy of Sargent's cele-

brated portrait of Mr. Harding. She looked at it critically as she stood waiting. It had always seemed to her the perfection of portraiture. The poise of the head, with its characteristic upward thrust of the clean-cut chin; the sweep of the mustache; the silvery light on the hair; the slender, vigorous hand resting carelessly on the chair-arm; each tiniest detail expressed to the full the man's dominant personality. Suddenly there flashed in its place the haggard face, lined and shadowed, with shrinking, guilty eyes. The contrast with this look of tireless, untried youth shocked her.

"I am morbid. How I fancy things!" she had whispered, and left the store with the magazine.

When she reached home the open fire in the library invited her. The sky had clouded and a cold wind had chilled her in spite of her furs. After her lonely meal she settled herself cozily for the perusal of the article.

It opened in a light personal vein, with details both true and complimentary to its subject. Suddenly, with no transition, its tone changed. Mrs. Harding read on breathlessly. She had never known more of the American than her husband had told her. Now its dealings were detailed with clearness and spirit, with cold cita-

tions of time and peace. Moreover, this ruthlessness, double-dealing, theft and murder were laid by implication at its president's door. She hurried through each paragraph, going back now and then to read more slowly. The day clouded still more and the room grew dusky. Still she sat there with the magazine open at the Sargent portrait. She was seeing things clearly. Such journalistic comment as this would justify Theodore's taunt of the day before. She knew now why the daily papers came no longer to the house. She knew the meaning of the haggard face that so often smiled at her across the breakfast table. Could it be true? — one least word of it, of the man whom she had known so well and known so stainless? So absorbed was she that she did not heed her husband's step in the hall or on the library floor, until he stood by her side.

She looked up at him with wide, startled eyes and closed the magazine sharply. He took it from her clinging hands without a word and glanced at it. Her eyes fell; she could not see his face for tears, but stared instead at the blurred fire. She heard his breath caught sharply, his short, angry laugh, and then the magazine alighted in the flames before her, scattering the brands out upon the hearth.

Mrs. Harding sat silent and rigid, watching

the leaves curl as the flame took them. The keen, militant face of the Sargent portrait caught her eye for a moment. "Albion Harding, Monopolist," stared out from a page heading; and then the mass flared up for a moment and blackened.

"Well?"

Mr. Harding spoke abruptly. His tone was harsh and at variance with his usual courtesy. His wife's eyes met his for the first time in fear.

"What have you to say about it?" he said more gently, as he noticed her involuntary shrinking.

"Oh, tell me it isn't true, dear!" she said with her voice breaking. "Of course it isn't true."

"I have tried, Evelyn, God knows how I have tried." He was kneeling now with his arm about her. "I have tried. From the start I meant that this big association should stand for truth, and honor, and uprightness in the business world. Mr. Evans called it the 'Missionary Monopoly' because I was so strenuous that it should stand as an example to all the world." The name which had once stirred Mr. Harding's anger had now come to have a subtle comfort of its own as testifying to his good intentions.

He paused, as if waiting for her additional justification, but she was silent.

"I may have made blunders. I know I have. Circumstances have been too strong to combat with unfailing success. Some difficulties arose that no one could foresee." He spoke with such bitterness that she knew he meant Theodore's opposition. "But I am not beaten yet. I can see my way clearer to the end than I have yet done. And the end once gained, all the things that I have dreamed of will be possible."

There was silence once more. Mrs. Harding's throat quivered convulsively but she could not speak. An overpowering dread fell over the man's heart. Was he adjudged guilty at this tribunal also? He felt suddenly how little life would be worth to him if he could not read love and trust in his wife's eyes. All the unspoken shame and regret and remorse of the past months found expression in the choked cry:

"Evelyn, don't you believe me?"

"Of course I believe you," she said softly, clasping her hand over his. "It is all a wretched mistake. But it must be so hard for you. Why didn't you tell me and let me help you bear it."

"I wanted to spare you trouble, dear. I hoped you need never know. But I am glad to share the load."

All seemed clear between them. Albion Harding rejoiced that one soul, at least, believed in his integrity.

CHAPTER XXIII

The troubles of the American increased as the sweet days of the northern spring lengthened. Oakley and General Favor were fighting desperately in Washington for a favorable decision to the tariff struggle; but meanwhile the industry was paralyzed throughout the country. Burkhardt was keeping up American shares on Wall Street by fair means and foul; he was even, by unprecedented juggling, creating a little show of activity there. Everyone knew, however, that it was a false prosperity. To be sure, the opposition was likewise depressed, and could, in fact, hardly be designated by so concrete a name. Had the American wished to buy it would have found treating with its rivals an easy matter. Theodore alone had been more vigorous in his measures of late, growing strenuous as he came to suspect that Burnham had brought about Ordway's failure in the interest of the American.

Anger gave his usually conservative nature a strange rashness.

Mr. Harding alone seemed untroubled. In reality he was resolutely shutting his eyes to the dreaded possibilities of the future. He did each day all that was in his power of thought and action for the great corporation, then he dismissed the matter from his mind. He spent long hours with his wife, his books, his organ; he grew to have a curious fondness for seeing his name in print with allusions to his great power.

He sat at his desk one May morning with a daily paper before him. His eyes were fixed on a cartoon of himself seated at his desk, pressing a row of little buttons. These were connected by wire with the Senate chamber of the United States, where puppets sprang up and down at his will. The likeness was excellent, the implication of such power flattering. The deep, underlying scorn of the drawing, the shame to the nation and himself that there should be the slightest ground for such a suggestion, escaped him.

He threw the paper beneath the desk as he heard a familiar footstep without, and forced a smile of greeting. He was, in truth, weary of Burnham's interminable discussion of forebod-

ings. The latter was full of a new grievance as he entered.

"Do you know what that boy of yours has been doing now?" he said in tones of mingled anger and triumph. "You know that mill of Lambert's in North Lee,—the one that the American bought and sold a man named Grant for a tannery? Well, your son has bought it and is fitting it out."

"Yes, I had heard. It seems a rash move in the present state of things," Mr. Harding answered calmly.

"What are you going to do about it?" Burnham's tones were curt.

"About what?"

"See here, Harding! We've beat about the bush long enough. What are you going to do about the boy?"

Mr. Harding flushed. "If the tariff is arranged to suit us we need not fear his opposition," he answered.

"Well, and if it isn't? The one thing that I can see to save the American from an absolute slump will be to have Theodore out of the way. That will practically kill the opposition. I know it's hard on you. I don't wonder you try not to see that it has got to be done." Burnham was

forced to sympathy by the look on his companion's face.

"He is young and hopeful, just starting out in life. Financial troubles will be hard for him to bear," the father said.

"Oh, he'll bear them all the easier if he's young and hopeful, and he surely doesn't deserve much consideration, supposing you had any right to discriminate."

The moment which Albion Harding had dreaded for so long had come and found him unprepared. It seemed almost impossible, even in the midst of the anger and grief which he felt at the thought of his son, to do this thing. But Burnham pressed the matter.

"You can make it all up to him later, but it's got to be done."

"I have no assurance that he will let me make it up to him."

"You have stood a good deal," Burnham urged with some subtlety. "A good many men would have put him in his place to start with. He is spoiled; hard times will be good for him."

Mr. Harding was silent. Burnham's words had brought back to his mind all the injuries and disappointments he had suffered at his son's hands from early years up to the present. Last

and most cruel of all, the son was forcing upon his conscience one more guilty stain.

"You can't expect me to devise means for the ruin of my own son," he said peevishly. "I leave it all to you. Only mind this; no personal harm must come to him — and — don't use dishonorable means. Do you mind going now? I don't care to discuss it any more."

Burnham puckered his lips as he went downstairs. "Quite a proposition! Honorable means!" he said, and laughed shortly.

Burnham, however, was in no mood for laughter. He was a man who preferred to look life straight in the face, who found no pleasure in a fool's paradise. All that made life worth living money gave him; unlike Mr. Harding, he had no inexpensive pleasures. If, with the wreck of the American, should come his own financial ruin, and with it a cessation of the pleasures of the race-course, the gaming table, the palate, he knew that he would not scruple to end existence. This possibility did not seem far distant, as he regarded the situation with eyes just clear enough to see the dangers but not the grounds for hope. Meanwhile he had every incentive to struggle and no scruples to hinder him.

He had, however, the qualms of Albion Harding's conscience to consider. He knew clearly

enough that the president of the American was willing to sacrifice time, convenience, ease, money to the great cause, but was yet eager to keep intact his good opinion of himself. He comprehended, in a measure, that Mr. Harding was willing to give up much of honest self-knowledge to keep this inner approbation unsullied; and realized that it would be for his own advantage to observe strictly his chief's hint as to his unwillingness to assist at his own son's downfall.

He did not know what to do with this partial liberty at his disposal as regarded means. He saw plainly that radical measures were necessary, but he was unwilling to incriminate himself in any way. He knew that Mr. Harding did not like him, and foresaw shrewdly that if the agent should become involved in anything criminal the principal would not come to his assistance. Mr. Harding's caution as to honorable means he dismissed without further thought.

He was walking the streets of the valley late one May evening, restless after a harassing evening, when a sudden shower sent him into the doorway of the Labor League Hall for shelter.

He slipped casually into a vacant seat, and in a moment was absorbed by the words which he heard. Max Rubinovitch, the Russian Jew and labor leader, was speaking.

"Yes, men, Albion Harding would smile if he heard me say that he and men like him are paving the way for State Socialism. But I tell you it's true. The trust, in all its blackness, is an angel of light. When the trust has grown stronger, and has taxed the people a little more, it will find that its day is over. Let it grow like some magnificent, deadly Upas tree, until the plain people of the country shall rise and say there shall be no more rich and poor, no more classes and masses; that each man shall give to the perfect state the best of his labor and ability, and exact from it shelter and food, comfort and simple pleasures, and protection in age and sickness."

Burnham heard no more. Something in the words had suggested a plan to him, wild and chimerical, yet more of a clue to his perplexing problem than any he had yet found. He gazed at the speaker keenly. He had been familiar with the face for several years. Their times of coming and going had fallen together, as the ways of men will do, in a city large or small. He noted a marked deterioration in the man's appearance. His brilliant coloring had faded to an unhealthy greyness, his dress was untidy. Here and there the rich flow of words faltered for a moment. The voice had grown harsh and

husky in certain notes. Burnham, gazing fixedly, thought the man had been drinking. If this surmise were true, it simplified as well as complicated the plan which had suddenly flashed over him.

He waited until the meeting was over and then linked his arm familiarly through Rubinovitch's, and spoke carelessly.

"See here, Mr. Rubinovitch, all this business you have been talking about big combines interests me immensely."

"Does it?" Rubinovitch inquired apathetically. The stimulus of his eager audience gone, he had grown listless.

"You really mean to say that you think the success of trusts would finally secure your reign of socialism, or whatever you call it?"

"Surely," said Rubinovitch with more animation. "The people are hard to rouse, but the rule of shameless greed will excite them at last."

"And you think things look that way even now?"

"I don't see how any one can doubt it. Look at the power trusts are getting everywhere. They almost have power of life and death over their men. They will use any means to crush opposition. They control more than half the state legislatures, and they are going to control the

national one. They grind the poor all the time and heap up money and give it away, and you never find an institution, however holy its pretences may be, however it may pose before the world, that won't take their money, stained by blood and the sweat of unpaid toil though it is. I say the money better stay where it belongs in the first place, than be heaped up by foul means and given away in charity. It isn't charity that the workmen want, but the independence which is their due."

Rubinovitch was talking wildly in his platform tones, and with a platform exaggeration. Burnham, sensible of the absurdity of the situation, guided his excited companion back to the more practical aspect of the subject by a skilful question. "Then you think people who oppose the combine are really hindering progress?"

"The less opposition they meet the sooner they'll drive the people to action," Rubinovitch said decidedly.

"And measures against the opponents of the trust would bring about the end you are after sooner than measures against the trusts themselves."

"Yes, I suppose it follows," Rubinovitch said thoughtfully. "One can't help sympathizing with the fight against monopolies, but practi-

cally I suppose their opponents are only delaying the time when the people will rise and sweep the monopoly, along with the government it controls, off the face of the earth."

The two men separated, and Rubinovitch went home to his poor room, sparely furnished save for the many books which he had collected through years of study. He sat awhile by his window in deep and bitter thought. He was a disappointed man, alien alike to his own race and that in which he had sought adoption. He knew that he had never made the place for himself which his talents merited. Ill-health and pain had robbed him of his splendid physique, and the insidious habit which had come of suffering had worked havoc with his keen, self-schooled brain. Max Rubinovitch realized bitterly that he was a failure. He had, however, his consolations. He knew that he swayed his audiences as never before, and something like intoxication seized him as he exerted this power to the utmost. Sometimes in his clearer moments he knew that much of his speech was wild and florid, without ordered thought; even then, however, he recognized its power, a power that clearer thinking lacked. The one idea reiterated, had acquired a force in the simple minds he dominated which nothing could neutralize.

He had another alleviation in his dreary lot. Books had begun to fail him of late; but in their place had come something even more satisfying. A certain small white powder could fill the room with glowing Utopias. He measured out a portion of this on the evening of his conversation with Burnham, and soon the ideal state, rose-colored and confused, but perfectly real and vivid, took shape before his half-closed eyes. He dreamed of a time when a man should be a man and nothing more, and each traveller through life could walk erect and unaided.

Only a few days later Burnham, driving rapidly, overtook Rubinovitch and asked him to ride. They sat for a while in silence, then Burnham said abruptly:

"I've been thinking about that theory of yours!" He tried to smile, but his heavy form was almost trembling with excitement. These few minutes might mean so much.

"What theory?" queried Rubinovitch abstractedly.

"Why, your indirect way of getting rid of trusts by destroying all opposition and letting them ruin themselves. It's quite a scheme. You see I'm a little interested in one combine myself, and I confess I should like to see the opposition to it wiped out. The trust would last out my

time even then, I guess, and after that —" he laughed grimly. "But the curious thing about all you theorists is that you never seem to think of putting your ideas into practice."

"When the time is ripe you will find us ready," Rubinovitch said musingly. "One false, precipitate step might delay the end we seek by a hundred years."

"And striking while the iron is hot hasten it as much. But there,— theories, theories."

"Not all theories, either. You'll see us putting them into practice when the time is ripe." Rubinovitch spoke defiantly.

"You'd better be careful. I shall expect that you'll be blowing up Theodore Harding's mill next thing, so that the American shall have a clear road to ruin."

Burnham laughed as if the idea was preposterous, but Rubinovitch did not seem to see the humor of the remark.

"You think that would destroy the opposition?" he questioned keenly.

"Can't say for certain, of course; but all the rest of them seem to be on their last legs."

"He might rebuild," Rubinovitch suggested.

"Hasn't got the money, I'm pretty sure, and he's not a chap to do much borrowing. It would come pretty hard on him, though."

Something in the tone jarred on Rubinovitch.

"Any harder, tell me, than life does every day on two-thirds of the human race?"

"He hasn't been used to it, you see."

"Then he has had so much more good fortune than the rest of us. Not but I like him. He's the one man in this city or this country either that I care a d—n for. But there's no reason he should have everything and I nothing. There are men just as good as he, who have worked harder every day of their lives, and have died in the poorhouse at last."

"Do you suppose this revolution of yours will come without violence?" Burnham asked casually.

"You can hardly expect the final upheaval to come without bloodshed." Rubinovitch spoke calmly.

"But if you could blow up Theodore Harding's mill when he wasn't in it you'd prefer to do it, then?" Burnham laughed as if the putting of Rubinovitch's vague theories into concrete terms were a huge joke.

"Of course," Rubinovitch said abstractedly. He had drifted once more into the dream world which bordered his life.

That night the young man sat by his window

until late. He watched the passers-by as their number gradually lessened, and saw the glimmering windows darken one by one. He saw lamps whiten in the early radiance of the East. His head was full of dreams. He saw himself as the agent in the great Millennium for which he hoped. The shibboleth of his creed, "From each according to his ability; to each according to his need," was something more than an epigram to Max Rubinovitch. It was the outline of a possible and even probable state of society. He admitted, as he pondered, that his comrades in the cause had lacked practicality. It was time, as this plain business man had intimated, that theories should be given over for practice.

One decisive step, if no more, was possible. Theodore Harding once out of the way, the American, one of the largest of the big monopolies, could prosper unhindered. It could amass unlimited wealth, and with this wealth buy everything it craved, even up to the power of government,— everything but the acquiescence of the people.

That at last would come to an end. Then the plain men of the country would spring into revolt, peacefully at the polls, or in blood on the battle-field, and the people, at last triumphant, would destroy the trust-subsidized government,

and set up a Utopian republic of actual equality. There would be no high places in this ideal commonwealth, save in the memories of its citizens, but there the name of Max Rubinovitch would be loved — as that of the one who had struck the first blow.

The thought came back to him again and again, night after night. What if this were the decisive moment and he let it slip? He steeled his heart against pity. Harding's suffering would be no more than that of all the world save the chosen few. In his high, drug-inspired mood, he found no qualms of conscience to hinder him. His mind had been hardened for years to the sacrifice of life, if it were necessary, for the triumph of a principle. He had gazed too often in fancy upon bloody battle-fields, stained for the cause of the people, to shrink from the mere destruction of property. The mill was not Harding's, in point of fact; it belonged to the operatives, who through long years of ill-paid labor had earned it for him. It should go to them, at last, if not for years, then none the less surely.

Sometimes, in the long nights in which he thought of these things, the question of time would trouble him. His life would have gone out in nothingness, he would be but a part of inanimate creation once more when the new régime

should set men free. But at other moments, when his hopes glowed highest, it seemed to him that a few years might see the impossible made possible, the bondman at liberty.

CHAPTER XXIV

Theodore was puzzling over business that spring with more than usual concentration. By Mr. Ordway's will he had been named executor, and in this way had fallen heir to much of trouble and perplexity. It was indeed dreary work, trying to save some little remnant from the general wreckage, a labor made even harder by the feeling that his own father had wrought the ruin.

It seemed as if William Ordway had gone mad in the last six months of his life. He had been for sixty years plodding and prudent, wasting nothing, borrowing nothing even in times of extremity. Then all at once, with almost certain failure staring him in the face, he had borrowed right and left, apparently regardless of what would happen to his wife and daughter when all was over. It was an instance of the insanity which seems to lie latent in the sanest minds,

ready to break forth when circumstances conspire aright.

When matters were finally settled the house remained only slightly encumbered. Faith had fulfilled her jesting prophecy and opened the little restaurant on a business basis, with an ability that bade fair to make it a financial success. Theodore had wished to take their burdens upon himself, and had urged a speedy marriage. Faith, however, had demurred, anxious to prove her competence to support herself, and Theodore had not then felt inclined to plead or coerce. He grew impatient, however, as the spring passed, and he could see no reason for delaying their marriage. Days spent apart had grown to seem days wasted to him. A feeling new to him, of fear and foreboding at his own happiness, came sometimes to vex his lonely moments. He could not analyse his late sense of foreboding, but sometimes the thought of the many hazards of living, and the uncertainty of the future terrified him.

One day in May, as they drove among the hills to the north of Underhill, he made up his mind to speak decisively. He had determined that he would not be put off.

"I want to talk something over with you, Faith. I don't mean to be unreasonable or to

hurry you, dear; but I want to know when you will marry me."

"Oh, Theodore, don't; not for a long time." There was something like fear in her voice.

"Why not, Faith? You owe me a reason," he urged gently.

"Only think how short a time we have been engaged,— not two months," she protested.

"What does that have to do with it, dear girl? We have known each other a long time. We are neither of us likely to change."

"And there's mother."

Theodore was very patient. "You won't have to leave her. We can live together. You can go on with the restaurant, if you insist,— you may have to support your bankrupt husband that way, some day. I don't know that I ought to urge it, just on that account." He turned suddenly sober. "I may be a poor man, Faith; there is always that to consider. But I've got my two hands — and my knowledge of the business. Lots of people start with no more."

"That doesn't count with me," said Faith decidedly. "It would be strange if we couldn't manage. There's always the restaurant, you know," and she tried to laugh.

"Then you will?" he questioned eagerly.

"Some time, of course. But I don't want to now."

"And I do. I don't want to be selfish, and if any of your reasons were good ones I think I could be convinced. If you have any feeling about giving up your liberty — or anything of that sort, don't think of it again. You shall have the same freedom."

"It isn't that. We've neither of us any liberty worth speaking of, even now. We gave that up when we began to love each other."

"By Jove, that's so!" said Theodore delightedly. "I never thought of it in that way before. But what is your reason, then?"

"I suppose it's because this is so beautiful and satisfactory that I'm afraid to spoil it by trying for anything better. It's because I'm afraid," she murmured, half-shamefacedly.

"Faith, I'm sorry to insist, but just talk sense a little. Do you think we are ever going to know whether we'll be happy or not until we try? It doesn't do any good to put it off. If anything should happen to either of us," his voice broke.

"I know it, dearest. Sometimes I can't sleep for thinking of the American and that awful Mr. Burnham. If they should harm you in

any way I could never forgive myself for refusing —"

Harding laughed in genuine amusement.

"The president of the American is my father, and however much we may disapprove of his methods I don't think we need fear that he will use violence toward his son. But as you say, you would feel badly —" he was taking advantage, half-jestingly, of her fears.

"And you are making fun of me. It isn't anything to joke about."

"All right, I won't. I never felt less like joking in my life."

There was a little pause, then Harding continued:

"I don't want to play the baby, Faith, but you've no idea how lonely I have been. I always was a fellow who liked to settle down at home after my day's work was done. It's almost a year now since I had a home at all, and there wasn't much comfort in it for a long while before that. I'm getting tired of living the way I do. A dog isn't much of a family, after all," and he laid a caressing hand on the head of Dave who sat on the bottom of the buggy.

They were bound for the little hunting lodge in the woods where Theodore had spent many happy hours, and they drove on in almost utter

silence until they reached their destination. But when Theodore opened the door of the little house Faith uttered a cry of delight.

She went about the long room and they discussed some improvements upon which Theodore wished her approval. She admired all the contrivances for comfort willingly, but all the time she was deep in thought, deciding almost without reflection an important question. Theodore's arguments had not convinced her, but his appeal to her sympathy had.

She had made up her mind as they moved out side by side upon the little porch and gazed up the lake. The clouds floated rose-colored above the dark pines. The wind had sunk and the lake reflected rose and green. Bird-notes jangled musically in the Sabbath air. Suddenly from afar sounded the note of the whip-poor-will.

Theodore drew his sweetheart to his side.

"Do you like it, Faith?" he said gently.

"It is beautiful!" she answered softly. "Shall we come here then?"

There was a little pause, then he caught her meaning.

"When?" was all he said.

"Will it be too long till the last of June?" she answered.

As the June days drew toward their longest, Underhill talked of Theodore Harding's approaching marriage, of his father's anger and his mother's grief; and speculated on the outcome of the business struggle between Theodore and his father. No one guessed, however, least of all Theodore himself, that the American was in desperate straits; had such a rumor gone abroad the interest would have been more intense. Theodore, with his characteristic belief in the goodness of human nature, never suspected for an instant that his rivals meditated any harm to him.

There was little left of the Theodore Harding of college days in this man — little and yet much. There was the same joyous, spontaneous kindness and friendliness toward all the world, man and brute; there was the same lack of any depth of thought; the man, like the boy, took his opinions ready-made; but in place of the crude, half-understood dissatisfaction were a strength and poise of which the boy had hardly given promise.

Harding had a fully formed aim in life, justified by six years of endeavor, to live cleanly and honestly, making the best of himself. He had settled to his work with the conviction that it was the one for which he was fitted, with the certainty that his calling was a high and honorable one. He had dignified even commonplace labor by

the way in which he regarded it. With the wild young lads of the mills Theodore had been particularly successful. He had known all the temptations that come to the restless nature, the unfilled mind. His past experience had made him tolerant of wrongdoing in others. The boys' clubs which he had organized had grown beyond the bounds of his own mill, as most of his enterprises did, and had taken in many lads from all Underhill. One day Theodore had said, half-bashfully, in answer to some comment on the growth in order among the rough youths:

"Do you know, Frank, you are responsible for that, partly. When I see a fellow going the pace, I tell him what you said to me once."

"What was that?" Reid queried.

"Why, you said if I had a young brother for whom I was responsible, I would do the best for him I could, not get him into scrapes; and when he was in them I would help him out, and not call him down too hard,— that I would try to make just as much of a fellow of him as I could. That made me think more about it than I ever did before, and somehow or other it strikes every fellow I've ever said it to the same way. Of course it doesn't always last, but it always makes 'em think."

"You've got hold of them in some way or

other, Teddy. There's no doubt about it. You're the most popular man in Underhill."

"Oh, shut up, Frank. You're a flatterer. I shall begin telling you some truths about the 'Criterion,' if you don't look out. Evans wrote me the other day that you would make it the most influential paper in the state if you kept on as you had begun."

It was only a week from his wedding day and Harding had made all his preparations for a flying trip to New York. Faith and he were to spend their honeymoon at the camp on Clear Pond, and Theodore wished to be as free from business cares as possible. So he was getting through a great amount of work beforehand. They must, of course, make frequent trips back and forth — Theodore to take charge of the mill, Faith to see to the management of the restaurant which had not yet been given up. But they were sure of long drives in the morning and afternoon, of sunsets and moonrises over the lake.

As he dressed for his trip that afternoon Harding whistled like some gleeful blackbird, companioned as he was by the thought that on his next business trip to New York his wife should go with him.

He ran downstairs with his bag in his hand

and the dog at his heels and met Max Rubinovitch lounging beside the door. Something in the listless droop of the man's shoulders and his sunken eyes roused Harding's pity. He stopped now on a friendly impulse.

"Hulloa, Rubinovitch!" he said, "Were you coming up to see me?"

The other looked at him dully.

"No," he answered.

"It's just as well, for I'm going to catch the train for New York. But say,— why don't you come around sometime? You've given it up altogether."

"What difference does it make?" Rubinovitch asked sullenly.

"Not any, may be, to you, but it does to me. We used to have some splendid talks. I never saw a man I could disagree with better." Theodore's tones were friendly.

"We never did agree very well," said Rubinovitch slowly, his face brightening a little under Harding's cordiality. "I don't agree with you over the stand you are taking about the trust. You are all wrong."

"Perhaps I am," said Harding good-naturedly. "I should like to have your ideas about it. Come around the first of the week, when I get home from New York, and we'll talk it over. It

may be your last chance to call on me in my bachelor den. Good bye."

Harding moved hurriedly down the street, fearful lest he had squandered precious time. He had meant to take a roundabout route in order to leave the dog at Mrs. Ordway's, but on looking at his watch he decided to send him back from the station. His haste, however, was useless, for, as he entered the station square, the train drew steadily out.

Harding turned on his heel in disgust. There was no other train until morning. There was nothing to do but to go back to the mill, and while away the time as best he might. Faith was out of town and would not return until the next day, so she could offer no resources. He took a sudden resolve at sight of a small boy.

"Hi! Jimmy," he called. "Going anywhere in particular?"

"Goin' up to me grandmother's on the 'lectrics. What you want?"

"I'll give you a quarter if you'll take this bag up to the mill and set it inside the side door. See?"

"Yes, boss," and the youngster pocketed the coin joyfully.

"Here's the key. Leave it with Mr. Casey in the mill. I've got another."

Then Harding struck out at an easy pace on the Baxter Road, with the dog making wide circuits on either side.

The fading day was cool and the roads were hard with the rain of the night before. The air was resonant with bird-songs; the shadows stretched long before him as he went toward the East. He looked back with pride from the top of a hill upon his chimneys smoking busily among the rest, and wondered what the future had in store for all his business plans. Then he turned and swung out into the country. Nothing could cloud his content for long.

He ate his supper at the little "Cross Road's Inn" far out, and lingered long over the simple meal. Then he trudged back, tired and happy, stumbled upstairs in the darkness, leaving Dave to seek his usual resting place of warm nights down by the stream side, and flung himself sleepily on the couch without undressing.

CHAPTER XXV

"Only a day or two more and the end is sure."

Oakley and Mr. Harding were seated in the library talking over the results of the mission to Washington. The latter leaned back with a sigh of relief.

"It has been a long, hard fight."

"That's a fact. But they have delayed and compromised and squabbled until we are sure of getting what we wanted," Oakley replied a little contemptuously. "We've got what we wanted and we've paid the price," he added almost reluctantly. His air had a strange mingling of shame and triumph; he had changed in some subtle way and there were new lines in his good humored face. Mr. Harding interrupted hastily.

"Much hard work has certainly been done."

"And more than hard work has gone into it," Oakley commented irritably. "You have called for no statement of our expenditures."

"I did not require any. I felt that I could safely trust the matter to you."

"But I prefer to give one," said Oakley recklessly, pouring out another glass of wine. "Here's a list of —"

"You are very rash to carry any such document about with you," Mr. Harding interposed hastily.

"It would tell nothing to anyone else. It is merely a list of names. Aren't you going to look at it?"

"I prefer not to see it," the president of the American said slowly. "Nothing is to be gained by it, that I can see."

Oakley looked at his father-in-law with a slow-kindling spark of anger in his eyes. The peculiar moral cowardice of the man, the willingness that the deed should be done, if only in some way he might shirk the personal responsibility, dawned on the young man for the first time.

"General Favor said once, 'Harding thinks he can make the government of the United States engineer his personal schemes and yet keep his hands clean. He'll find out his mistake before he get's done with it,'" Oakley said abruptly.

"I don't know what that has to do with this matter. The fewer people who know of this the better," Mr. Harding persisted.

"That doesn't shift your personal responsibility."

"I never thought it did. I can bear the onus of responsibility for this necessary measure," Mr. Harding responded severely.

"How necessary?" Oakley asked in incredulous tones.

"If that measure had been put through the American would have gone into a receiver's hands inside of six months."

"You don't mean it?" said Oakley, truly shocked by this sudden news.

"Would I be likely to jest about it? Of course this is in the strictest confidence, but I wanted you to know that I am hard pressed. Perhaps you will be less ready to criticise now you know how matters actually stand."

"I admit that you are in a hard place, but I don't know that that fact saves my self-respect." The tone was not tolerant.

"I don't know that it does. I can only point out to you that no one compelled you to engage in this business in any way. The blame seems to me wholly your own. You knew what you would have to do if you went to Washington."

Oakley said nothing. His eyes were cold, his kindly face was grim. He felt that he had lost his honor in this cause and had little sympathy

for the equivocations of the man who had urged him to his shame. He had yielded good-naturedly to Mr. Harding's wishes and the increasing pressure of financial difficulties, and had helped spend the money of the American freely. He dreaded the storm of censure which would arise when the Barnes bill should actually come to a vote. He foresaw that his name, humble instrument though he was, would be unfailingly associated with it.

"And so Theodore is going to be married next week?" said Oakley after a long and awkward pause. He poured himself still another glass of wine and his hand trembled, letting a drop fall on the polished table. His three months in Washington had told on him in more ways than one. "And I suppose he thinks he is going to be perfectly happy," he added bitterly.

Mr. Harding gave his companion a searching look. Of course Oakley and Althea were not happy. How could they be, with Althea's extravagance and impatience of control, and Oakley's continual worry and dissatisfaction.

So many unpleasant thoughts crowded upon Mr. Harding that he sought the music room instead of his chamber. A puff of cool air, laden with the scent of pines, met him as he opened the door. The room as usual rested him at his very

entrance. It was but dimly lighted. One antique lamp in a dull gold bracket beside the organ shed a yellow light on the gleaming keys. The room was otherwise in twilight. The high arched windows were open wide, and low in their framing twinkled the many lights of the valley.

Albion Harding sank restlessly to the seat before the organ and brought forth thunderous chords; his pent-up unrest sought relief in a tumult of discordant notes. They were no more discordant than his life, he told himself with cruel frankness,— his life with its contrast between profession and practice. He had read in a marked paper that morning a cruel arraignment of himself and his methods, which specified step by step the means by which the American had been able to gain its ends. Some of the accusations stung him with their truth, some with their falsity; but at the end came a few bitter words that had rung in his ears all day:

"Does he think, we wonder, that ignorance of the means by which his ends are gained frees his poor, equivocating soul from its burden of crime?"

The bitter words filled his thoughts as he wrenched desultory chord and cadence from the organ. It mattered not that the journal was a scurrilous and abusive sheet; the years met him in

arraignment. Ordway's worn face as he had seen it last, Oakley's reckless, bitter laugh, the early threads of grey in his son's hair, his wife's furtive, searching look when she thought him absorbed,— all these confronted him. He had done these things.

And what was he? In common opinion little better than a murderer, a thief, a corrupter of the government of his native land. How had this come about? He thought of the young man, known to the roistering students of a German university as "Lady Harding." He had been true and honorable. When had the change begun? He had thought himself just and merciful all these years. He did not see, even in this moment of self revelation, that he had compromised with his conscience here and there for years; that the need for ruthless cunning, for remorseless pursuance of his end at any cost, had never before arisen to try him.

He had gradually glided from clashing, disconnected chords into fragmentary strains. The eternal, restless striving for good and falling back into evil cried out under his touch. Life's fruitless aspiration, its underlying despair, sobbed from the big instrument. And still the self-communing went on.

Should not the motive count? He had not

done it for himself — self was at least secondary. He had labored for an idea, for a theory, for the hope of renovating the industrial world by the example he should set. Was it selfishness, as selfishness is usually counted, to wish to be the leader of a good cause? He had hoped to leave a name to his son and his son's sons which should stand for honor and probity, and a tense struggle against heavy odds, for the success of a theory. He admitted frankly that he had not been true to his ideals. He had been obliged to compromise, to give in a point here and there for the furtherance of his great aim. But was he not, on the other hand, more true to that ideal by giving in to pressure if this yielding alone made realization possible? Was it not, after all, nobler for him to have given up a point here and there of his highly prized self-esteem? Had he not made the greatest sacrifice possible when he had laid upon his conscience a blemish?

The music was doing its accustomed work with him. Half unconsciously the player drew forth strains more assured, less vibrant with loss and shame, pulsing with a great energy, a great victory. The cause was what he should think of; the end was to be desired, of that he was sure. Combination was a tendency, a force, no more to be thwarted or gainsaid than the tides or the cir-

cuit of the earth. What a work then was his who should pilot it aright!

And its course must be one of uprightness, he thought with tightened lips, as the organ notes swelled forth in a triumphal march. The worst was already over; victorious in the tariff fight, the path was clear ahead. There need be no measures taken against Theodore. He thanked Heaven that that deed had been averted in time. There had been other blots and blemishes in the past, he told himself sadly, though not so many nor so wanton as popular opinion hinted. He wondered if he could ever clear the name of the company from the stain that rested upon it, if he could ever stand again before men clear from the shadow of blame? He realized that the world could never know that the American had been forced to desperate measures for its bare existence. But the memory of men is short; he would have a fortune to give away and he vowed that he would not spare it in the service of mankind. The money should, at least, have no spot upon its spending. He thought, with a glow at his heart, of a little, struggling college of his own religious tenets of which he had read but lately. He remembered the recital of the work they were doing against almost overwhelming odds, and his heart swelled with gratitude for the assured prosperity

which would enable him to double or treble their efficiency. That would be a fitting thank-offering for his escape from financial ruin. He could proffer this aid before commencement. He could almost see the newspaper head-lines which should announce his gift, could almost fancy the cheers of the students, the smiles of professors. He remembered such scenes from his own college days. He felt that he must do this thing at once and hear words of praise associated with his name.

This plan soothed him until his mood became singularly softened. He felt at peace with all the world. He could even admit the errors of his past, the sincerity of his detractors. The music was drawing a merciful veil over the doubtful passages in his life. It seemed to him that his path was emerging, at last, from the valleys of perplexity, and a dreary compulsion, upon the hill tops of peace.

His hands glided into a soft adagio of Beethoven's which had always reminded him of a dim pine wood. The melody swelled and sank again like wind in the tree-tops, broken now and then by the soft falling ripple of a bird's cadence. Then silence would come for a second, after a lingering chord, followed by the rush of the wind-like melody once more. The abiding peace of the pine woods fell upon Albion Harding's

spirit. His easily moved, emotional nature answered to the music, the music responded to the emotion. Life was so simple after all. To do right was the only thing — and to do right should be his care; there was no need to do wrong any more, and the lost peace would yet come back.

One of those floods of emotion which seem to stand for so much in the soul's battle, and may after all mean so little in practical results, had hold of the man. The old peace had come back; that for the moment seemed all to him. He forgot the ruin that the big monopoly had left in its wake, the harm to all the lives which had touched his; or, if he remembered these things, it was only to see them all repaired as magically as the lost good had come back to him. His life should be one long service of reparation for the wrong he had inadvertently done,— inadvertently, he said now.

Upon the swells and diminuendos of the music were floating vague snatches of verse, the verse which expresses the musician's keen ache of happiness as no other has ever done. They rose and fell with the music, little more than glowing words. As the last soft notes throbbed away into silence, Albion Harding murmured in a voice that trembled,

"—— for my resting place is found, ——, ——. The C Major of this life, and now I will try to sleep."

Quick tears, drawn forth by a genuine desire for better things, as well as by his appreciation of the poetic beauty of the scene, rushed into his eyes. He leaned his head forward upon his arms. He was very tired and at peace. Life was plain before him once more, a life of reparation, without the giving up of his aim. God was good to him.

Suddenly a tremendous detonation shook the house, rattling the windows like castanets, and went rolling down the valley, gaining a new volume from each succeeding hill and at last dying away slowly into a dreadful silence of horror and amaze.

Albion Harding sat for a moment half-stunned. Then he was at the window, steadying himself by the casing with one hand, and straining his eyes out over the valley. All was darkness save for the occasional glow of a street light. Then, after a breathless pause, the thing which he feared to see, came to pass. At the place where his eyes were fastened, a slender, yellow tongue of flame rose into the darkness just where he had seen his son's chimneys smoke morning after morning.

Two thoughts came to him as he hurried to his wife's room — to reassure her and to see for himself. He found her at a south window gazing out over the valley.

"It's Theodore's mill," she said calmly. "He is killed!" Her lips were stiff and white.

Her husband put his arm about her. "Perhaps it isn't that at all. And you told me he was going to New York, didn't you, Evelyn?" he said, striving for calmness.

"He said so today — yesterday." There was a gleam of hope in her eyes. "Go quick and see!"

The sound of shouts came faintly up from the streets below, as Oakley and Mr. Harding ran down the hill. The doleful whine of the fire-alarm was answered by the brisk clanging of bells. White faces appeared at half-lit windows along the way. Men raced along the street, slipping on their coats as they ran.

The dread that clutched Mr. Harding's heart forbade speech and merged into physical pain. He had known this feeling of deathly illness more than once of late. His heart beat convulsively, and then seemed to stand still. He sank on the curb beside the way.

"Go on, Marcus!" he gasped, "I can't just now." And Oakley with one careless glance ran

on. In a moment the stabbing pain lessened and left Mr. Harding strangely weak. He was saying helplessly to himself, "He wouldn't do it unless he was away,— unless he knew Theodore was away."

He sat weakly in the shadow, watching the men of Underhill run past. At length he gained sufficient strength to go on and followed the hurrying procession wearily.

As he turned the sharp corner the scene of destruction met his eyes. The mill had stood apart from other buildings on the bank of the river. The explosion seemed to have driven the wreckage into two piles, one of which was flaming up grandly. Upon the other which had not yet caught fire, the engines were playing jets of water which took rainbow colors in the light of the flames. The river stretched a broad band of flame-color. Beyond in the firelight, the windows in the long tenements showed shivered into fragments. Here and there, too, an adjacent wall was crushed by the force of the explosion. The crowd, distinct in the firelight, pressed as close to the ruins as the cordon of police would permit.

"Where's Theodore?" the father's breathless voice questioned indiscriminately into the crowd.

"Has any one seen anything of my son? He slept in the mill."

The crowd was not over-tolerant of the question; it knew to a man that Theodore slept in the mill. It had its own bitter anxiety. A grim rumor was already whispered about from mouth to mouth — a rumor founded on nothing more than popular sympathy for the young man, distrust of the older one, and a dislike for the order of things which he represented.

"What in —— do you suppose we know about it?" a rough voice answered. "You are a pretty one to be askin' where your own son is! You're the one that's got something to gain by having him out of the way."

Mr. Harding winced at these words as if he had been struck. Anxiety regarding his son had for the moment obliterated the thought of his own position.

He pressed forward to the outskirts of the crowd.

"For God's sake, do something!" he cried in a choking voice.

"We're doing all we can, sir," a fireman answered respectfully. "We can't get any nearer until the fire's out. Besides, if he's under there —"

Mr. Harding noticed with strange minuteness

that the fresh leaves of the elms and maples showed pink in the light of the flames.

He went back and forth amid the crowd questioning breathlessly everywhere, but he got no trace. Dave, the setter, was running about with drooping plumy tail, and nose to the ground. Now and then he snuffed at some friendly hand extended to him, and whined piteously; but he would not stay his terror-stricken circuit.

Suddenly a hoarse voice, broken with emotion, shouted aloud into the silence, "He's all right. He went to New York this afternoon. Three cheers, men, and a tiger!"

The cheers rolled lustily up into the June night with an electric quality of love and relief in their rough burden.

"What's the matter with Teddy?" queried a voice lightly, and the chorus droned back in long response,

"He's all right!"

But the glossy dog still ran about uneasily through the crowd, trembling and whining. He could not understand the good news. Only the sight of his master would satisfy him.

CHAPTER XXVI

The crowd still lingered and Mr. Harding stayed with it. Some morbid fascination held him near the scene of his son's ruin. It seemed easier to send a messenger to his wife with word of Theodore's safety, than to meet at once her questions and speculations. So he stood with his arm through the low-growing branch of a young maple, still feeling weak and shaken.

As the crowd slowly dispersed, it discussed probable causes for the accident. Mr. Harding caught a word here and there, and heard more than once the name of the American. He wanted to proclaim aloud to these people that he was innocent. But no one spoke to him. One and all, seeing him, averted their eyes quickly. They knew that accident seemed hardly probable, here. A bursting boiler, they had argued, could not have created such havoc as this even had it been likely to occur; it was well-known that no

quantity of chemicals was ever kept in the mill. Moreover, the night-watchman had been borne away to the hospital declaring that all was as it should be. The fact was evident, also, that the American was the only gainer by the disaster.

Albion Harding, standing alone, saw Reid approaching and beckoned to him. He had never failed to find Reid sympathetic. The latter approached slowly with the dog at his heels. The troubled creature seemed to find comfort in Reid's presence.

Mr. Harding held out his slender hand, and snapped his fingers. He did not like dogs.

"Good fellow! Come here!" he said condescendingly. But Dave, completely unnerved, forgot his manners for a moment and showed his teeth in an ugly snarl.

"I'd take him home with me, but you see he won't come," Mr. Harding said helplessly. "You will have to take him with you." But the dog was off like a flash again, with his nose to the ground, yelping softly now and then with excitement.

"What were Theodore's plans?" Mr. Harding asked in a voice which he tried hard to control. There was something painfully pathetic to him in the dumb beast's grief over his master's misfortune.

"I don't know, I'm sure. He told me a day or two ago that he was going to New York yesterday afternoon. Several people saw him on his way to the station — so there's no doubt he has gone."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that, only he ought to be notified."

"Murray — his foreman — and I telegraphed him at the ——. He always goes there, you know. That's all there is to do. Poor Teddy!"

"I hope he will let me help him. Surely there is no reason why he should refuse my aid and sympathy at a time like this?" Mr. Harding spoke in a questioning tone and with a wistful note in his voice.

"No reason but — Mr. Harding, if you don't know what people are saying you ought to. They say that the American is the only gainer by Teddy's misfortune." Reid spoke abruptly.

"I shall not say that I think the accusation — the implication, unworthy of an answer," said Mr. Harding slowly. "Such an arraignment as that must be answered. Thank God, I can affirm upon my honor as a gentleman that I know nothing of this lamentable business."

The self-vindication failed in some indefinable way of the simple dignity at which it aimed. Reid remained unconvinced. He spoke coldly.

The haggard face, old and ill in the flickering fire-light, did not rouse his pity.

"Could it not have been done without your knowledge?" he asked slowly. He knew too much of Mr. Harding's methods of shirking detail and shifting responsibility to feel sure that this personal disclaimer freed the American.

"I see you disbelieve my statement that I had nothing to do with the matter; I can hardly convince you against your will. But it is a grievous disappointment to me to have you take a stand with my detractors." Mr. Harding's tones were full of an injured dignity.

"You mistake me, Mr. Harding. I trust your word implicitly, but I still maintain that it is possible for this to have happened through the agency of the American without your knowledge."

Reid would have said a few words in self-justification, but at this moment he saw Burnham approaching, and moved away. He cared little after all whether Mr. Harding understood him or not. He circled off through the crowd in search of the dog.

Mr. Harding and his agent met rather constrainedly. Burnham was fighting back his joy into a semblance of decent pity and concern. The matter had gone off better than he had dared hope. He had hardly slept, it seemed to him for

weeks, for wondering what his hints to Rubinovitch would accomplish. He had trembled for fear that the man's disordered brain should mislead him, and Theodore should suffer. He had faced the fact that the theorist might get no farther than theories; now all had happened just as he had planned in his most hopeful moments. The head of the opposition was crushed without personal danger to Theodore Harding. He himself was not implicated in the slightest degree. Even if Rubinovitch should by any unlucky chance be detected in the deed, no shadow of blame could be laid on him or the American. So he met Mr. Harding with a heart inwardly leaping with exultation.

"This will be a bad matter for your son, Harding; but after all I suppose a little adversity won't hurt him in the end, and it's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

"I disagree with you there. It's a very unfortunate thing for us, in my opinion, that this should have happened. Oakley is back from Washington and he assures me that matters there are perfectly safe. My son's competition would hardly have counted at all under those circumstances."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Burnham queried sharply.

"I did not know myself until tonight — last night."

"Well, matters are so much easier for the American, anyway," said Burnham complacently.

"And the whole country will say that it did this," Mr. Harding retorted.

"D—n the whole country! They can't prove anything."

"Of course not, but the suspicion is galling. I wish we had Reid and the 'Criterion' with us. He used to be heartily in favor of trusts, but he has changed. The support of our home papers seems to me very important. Fletcher is with us on principle, but Reid — "

"I'm inclined to think a pretty lump of Americans account for Fletcher's stand better than principle, but you know best. I imagine Reid could be secured in the same way; and, by the way, you advanced him money when he bought out McLeod, didn't you?"

"Yes," Mr. Harding answered slowly.

"Then it's easy enough. Of course he'll help us out," Burnham commented in satisfied tones.

"Will you see him, then?" Albion Harding asked.

"No, I will not," flamed Burnham. "I'm sick of doing all your dirty work and having you tell me it ain't necessary after it's all done. I don't

care a d—n about Reid and his little two-penny paper. If you do you can see him, that's all."

It piqued Burnham that his labor in this matter had been called unnecessary. He had, moreover, been proud of his part in the business. He had taken a leaf from Mr. Harding's book and made another man his tool, for once rivalling his master in subtlety. He was childishly elated over his skill, and could not bear that Mr. Harding, whose superiority he had always felt with irritation, should be ignorant of his strategy.

Mr. Harding disregarded the outburst.

"Reid represents the best feeling in this part of the state. That is surely worth taking into account," he said. "But never mind; he will have to take his course. It would do no good to try to influence him."

Burnham was not to be placated, however.

"You can do just as you see fit about that; but there's one thing sure; I'm goin' to give my report. I ain't goin' to have to bear all the responsibility for this business. I've been workin' as your agent."

"What business do you mean? You expressly stated that the American wasn't responsible for this disaster." Mr. Harding questioned coldly.

"You're mistaken there. I said nothing could be proved against it, that's true enough; but

I'll tell you one thing, Albion Harding, you can't shift all the blame. You have done the thing just as much as I have done it, and I have done it just as much as the man who put the dynamite in the mill basement."

Albion Harding put up his hand with a quick gesture.

"For God's sake, man, don't shout so! I don't want to hear your surmises!"

Burnham lowered his voice, but spoke on inflexibly. Neither man had seen Francis Reid approaching; neither saw him turn away in a dazed fashion.

Sick at heart the young man threaded his way through the dispersing crowd. The man upon whose probity he would have staked so much a year ago, was a villain and a coward at heart. Reid had not heard any of the details, he could fill those in easily enough from what he knew of the dealings of the American. He knew that Albion Harding had done this deed against his own son.

As he was wearily struggling with this horror, he saw the dog nosing the ground nervously before him. The big fellow looked up at his master's friend with eyes that seemed at once to ask and tell something. There was eagerness and anxiety in every line of the sleek figure.

Now and then a tremor would pass over his body and he would crouch with hunted eyes. Reid tried to call and even to drag him away from the scene of the accident, but the eager, welcoming light faded from the creature's face, and the whine changed to an angry snarl.

Daylight was already beginning to scatter the darkness. Through the gap left by the ruined mill Reid could see a light beginning to glow faintly in the East. Birds stirred with muffled chirps. He looked back upon the scene of the wreck of boyish, ambitious hopes. Two heaps of débris, side by side, one still glowing faintly, the other piled high and jagged, alone were left of the prosperous life of the day before. The crowd had melted away, a dusky figure stood motionless, guarding the ruin. Between the fire and the growing daylight, ran the anxious dog. The whole scene was strange, unreal, to Reid, with all that it implied of cruel power over simple right, as lurid as some cheap melodrama.

Reid turned and walked heavily down the street with his soul in arms against the cruelty of the world. It seemed to him that he could never believe again in any power stronger than mere brute force. He felt suddenly old and tired of life. His feet echoed loudly on the pavements,

and he shuddered as he heard behind him the dog's long-drawn, desperate howl.

The watchman dozed on the steps of a near-by house as the sun came up into a crimson sky, touched the ruins for a moment, and then disappeared into a cloud. A few drops of rain fell. The life of the city awoke, little by little. Country people with market teams came and gazed on the ruins, spoke together in low voices and drove away. Another day of commonplace labor dawned for every other business man in Underhill save Theodore Harding. And still the dog kept guard; in the crash and glare of light his world had been swallowed up. He was searching with moist nose and eager whines for the print of the feet which he had followed faithfully all his days. Perhaps he was revolving in his sensitive mind what might be his own responsibility. What had been the meaning of the dark figure clambering in through the basement window? What the mission of the heavy dragging feet which he had followed suspiciously down the street? Perhaps he thought, as did no one else, that his master was not so far but that a mournful, long-drawn call might reach him.

CHAPTER XXVII

Reid was at the station to meet Faith on her return next morning. He had hoped that he might be the first to tell her of the accident, that he might be able to spare her garbled accounts and speculations as to causes; but everyone had been talking of it on the train, and Reid knew, at his first glimpse of her white face and compressed lips, that she had heard. Her first words were,

"You've telegraphed to Theodore? Have you got any answer?"

"Not yet," he answered, trying to make his tones matter-of-fact. He felt as he spoke that his lips smiled stiffly. He had been oppressed with a dread that had not amounted to definite foreboding until he had learned a moment before that none of the station employees had seen Harding board the train the afternoon before.

"He always uses a trip-book, so he wouldn't

buy a ticket anyway. We might not have seen him. I tell you, Godkin will be down in half an hour. He can tell you whether Harding went up with him or not," the station master had said.

"It seems so strange you haven't heard," Faith had continued. "He would surely answer, wouldn't he?"

"I told him to, but he might not realize that we would be anxious."

"You directed to the —— ?"

"Yes. Oh, he's all right, Faith. He told Mrs. Harding at noon that he was going on the four-thirty, and any number of people saw him on the way to the station with his bag. It's only because we are shaken up any way that we worry."

"He might have been detained somewhere by the way."

"Lots of things might have happened. He might have gone to some other hotel. There! it's a pretty dismal sight, isn't it?"

"Oh, isn't it dreadful!" said Faith, breathlessly.

The scene was even more dreary than it had been the night before. As they approached silently a dog's long, doleful howl pierced the air.

"Perhaps you can get Dave away. I was one of the first people to get here, and he was racing

about then and has been ever since. He's all broken up; I can't do anything with him."

"He is looking for Theodore," Faith said, as the dog resumed his apathetic search. "But, Frank, you said he was here — when you got here!" She grasped his arm. Her face was colorless to her lips and her eyes wide. "Oh, Frank, he didn't go then,— Theodore didn't go! I know he didn't — he always left Dave with us, — and mother shut him in the shed."

In a moment she had dropped Reid's arm, and was hurrying over the strewn timbers and heaped up brick-work with the dog beside her. He seemed to recognize her nearness to his master, to feel that now this tangle would be set straight. Once when she fell upon the débris, hurting herself cruelly, the dog waited whining beside her. As if a common instinct of love were leading them they directed their steps to the spot where the timbers were heaped highest, hardly touched by the flames. Reid, who after his moment of bewilderment, had followed her, heard her calling, "Theodore! Theodore!" unmindful of the little crowd that had gathered about the scene of last night's disaster. Finally the girl knelt upon the pile, spent and unable to go further. The dog crouched by her side, thrusting his nose into her face.

"Theodore!" she called brokenly, "Theodore! Are you there?" She fondled the dog unwittingly as she spoke. "Dear, can't you tell me? Answer me!"

The choked, pleading voice compelled an answer. As Reid came up and threw himself by her side, they caught the faint, gasping words,

"Yes, Faith, I'm all right! But — have — them — hurry."

For one instant Faith lay with her cheek to the rough bricks.

Reid had already risen to his feet and was shouting,

"For God's sake, get men! Harding's in there!" and was himself tearing ineffectually at the timbers.

Then Faith rose to her feet and began her almost hopeless struggle for her lover's life — a struggle that lasted for months.

"Get doctors!" she called in firm tones. "And blankets and a stretcher. Somebody go for Mrs. Harding! And somebody go to Mrs. Ordway's and tell her to get a room ready!"

Then she knelt a moment to call,

"Only wait a moment, Theodore, dear, we'll get you out!"

The faint voice tried to answer, "It's all ——" then trailed off into silence. Faith and

Reid tore desperately at bricks and beams, aided by the few onlookers who had not scattered on the girl's imperious behests. But they kept at their work only for a moment. From all the near-by streets and alleys came the men from Theodore's mill. At leisure that day, they had been the first to hear the summons for aid. Boys and old men, strong men and women came running from every direction out of the white, cold fog that had settled down on the town and river. The faces were grey and worn with care, convulsed with grief, cold and set with wrath. Some of the men were even weeping, the tears running unheeded over their cheeks as they streamed out across the ruins.

Faith stood quietly aside. She knew that she was of no use there, and yet inactivity was unbearable and she feared that she might lose some last word. She stood with her hands clenched, biting her lips until they bled, and saying over and over to herself, "Why are they so slow! Oh, why are they so slow!"

She could not have told whether it was minutes or hours before Mr. Harding's black horses came galloping out of the fog, drawing the swaying carriage. In it sat Mrs. Harding alone. Faith ran forward and had her hand on the door before the carriage had stopped.

"Is he alive?" gasped Mrs. Harding.

"Yes, yes," Faith answered. "He said, 'I'm all right, but have them hurry.'"

"Then he isn't hurt?"

"Oh, he must be, but perhaps it isn't very bad."

More and more people came hurrying in from the by streets. Reid saw from his position, a little to one side where he could direct the changing shifts, that the employees of Mr. Harding's mill were there in a body. Their anxious foreman followed them.

"Say, but I couldn't make 'em stay. The minute the word got around in the mill they struck work and they're hot as pepper against the old man."

Reid had the rescue work well under his control. He had divided the men into five-minute shifts, and these changed silently and swiftly at his call. The men worked like tigers, regardless of themselves in their eagerness to help, each remembering some kind or thoughtful deed of Theodore's. Around stood a ring of women, slatternly and dishevelled in their limp calicoes, but with hearts warm and tender for the man who had so often stood their friend. Gradually the hill people came too, and stood with the valley folk and talked with them and the young

business men worked shoulder to shoulder with the factory hands in the changing shifts. Here and there, the pitying, anxious eyes of the crowd were turned from the men working with clenched teeth and laboring breath to the carriage where the girl with the crumpled and stained white waist, with the broad band of black from the charred timbers emphasizing the pallor of her face, was supporting the shrinking, daintily-clad woman.

Faith's very lips were pale, her eyes were wide with fright; yet there was something undaunted about her rigid face. She had somehow grasped life directly and surely as the other woman had not, in more than twice her years. It had wounded the girl, perhaps, as sorely as it had the woman, and yet she faced it unconquered.

The relays were changing when she leaped from the carriage and picked her way swiftly through the wreckage.

"Theodore! Theodore!" she called. "Can you hear me, dear? Only a few minutes more! They are almost down to you."

Her ear alone caught the faint answer, but she hurried back with it to the almost fainting mother, who was murmuring mechanically,

"Where can Mr. Harding be? Why don't

they send again for Mr. Harding? He would know what to do, I'm sure."

Faith's face grew hard and she did not answer.

Shift gave place to shift. Minutes passed like hours. A slow, dreary rain began to fall. Reid realized suddenly that he still had Faith's coat, which he had mechanically laid down, picked up and carried since he took it from her at the station. He ran to the side of the carriage and threw it over her unprotected shoulders.

"How much longer?" she questioned.

"Only a few minutes, now, Faith," he answered.

"Has he spoken again?"

"No, I think he is unconscious. I hope so. It is much easier for him."

He was glad that Faith made no movement to speak to Theodore again. He had leaned over himself, but a moment before, and the sight of the cruel beam that was crushing the life out of the slender figure beneath turned him sick and faint. The face was ghastly white, the bluish, blood-flecked lips were drawn back slightly away from the clenched teeth. The eyes showed violet-black through the closed lids. No breath seemed to stir the soft beard. Reid had no

doubt that the gentlest, truest man on earth, as he found himself calling his friend, was dead.

Tender hands at length released the ends of the timber which had pinned down the helpless figure. The heavy beam had been more kind than cruel, after all, for it had undoubtedly supported a weight that would have crushed out Theodore's life at once. Two men of his own mill, with whom he had worked shoulder to shoulder in his 'prentice days, leaned over with tears running down their cheeks and lifted him.

As Faith chafed the limp hand, Dr. Rice rose from beside the litter and looked across the kneeling girl with pitiful eyes which told Reid of his utter lack of hope.

"We'd better take him home at once," he said huskily.

"He is coming to our house," said Faith, hurriedly. "It is nearer, and mother has a room ready for him."

"His own home is the place for him. It is quieter on the hill," Mrs. Harding protested.

"Home? How much has it been home to him lately? How much can it be after this? Would he want to go there?" Faith flamed out passionately. She felt that she could never have him go there to his father's house, that she could never go with him.

Dr. Rice settled the question.

"The nearer place is the better. Take him to Mrs. Ordway's," he said autocratically.

Four of Theodore's most trusted mill-hands carefully raised the litter. Then they set off down the street in silence, the doctor walking watchfully beside with his hand on the fluttering pulse. Mrs. Harding's carriage followed slowly. Once Faith looked back and saw with a shudder that some of the workmen had fallen in behind.

As the procession passed Falmouth Street, Mr. Harding came to the corner. His step was lighter than it had been for weeks, his brow less furrowed. He stood there, gazing at the strange procession which barred his way. Any hint of the long suspense of the town had somehow failed to reach him, as it occasionally does the person most concerned. The meaning of this quiet, grief-stricken concourse puzzled him. Then in a flash he recognized his horses, his wife, and Faith. The girl's eyes, dark and frightened, rested upon him in a gaze, warning, accusing, horror-stricken,— the gaze of his own conscience. Then they were averted while a sudden contraction passed over the stern young face.

Then Mr. Harding knew that he was not surprised, that this was the thing which he had dreaded in the midst of his relief. He had been

waiting for this, with a catch in his breath at the thought. Now, of a sudden, mental anguish merged itself into physical. The stab of the realization of the worst, pierced him with the old sickening pang. It had never lasted so long before. He thought, with a throb of something like relief, that the last time had come. He leaned heavily against the wall. The world might be more lenient in its judgment of the dead than the living. Then the anguish passed. A reprieve had been given him — the murderer.

Albion Harding sat alone all that afternoon in his office. It rained without, a warm June rain that came in heavy showers and sent foot-farers into convenient doorways. He watched the shining drops stream down over the pane. The weakness which always followed one of the attacks of pain held him benumbed. The exertion which had carried him to Mrs. Ordway's, at the rear of the procession, had almost exhausted him. The air of hushed excitement there had well-nigh overcome him, and he had come back to a spot where he could be still. In his weakness, the years of misunderstanding and disappointment had slipped away somehow, and he was thinking of his son as a little boy — sturdy, black-eyed, tuneful, with his childish grasp of business and his friendliness with the men. Al-

bion Harding had always loved his son, and his heart ached with pain and fear.

At length night followed the interminable afternoon, and the harassed man, unmindful of the fact that he had not eaten since morning, paced up and down in front of Mrs. Ordway's house. A carriage drew up silently before the door, and he saw the great New York surgeon, whose moments were golden, mount the steps rapidly. Dr. Rice met him at the door, and the watcher across the street could see them talking earnestly in the hall. Figures passed and repassed on the lighted curtain of the corner room above the street. The faint, nauseating odor of chloroform floated out. Mr. Harding was affected by sickness and suffering more deeply than most men, and he turned faint.

As he leaned in silence against the little maple before the door a dog sniffed at his hand and then jumped back with a muffled snarl. A step sounded upon the veranda and a voice called softly, "Dave! Dave!" The dog left Mr. Harding's side and ran up the steps with a low whine.

"Oh, Dave, I can't bear it!" a voice said brokenly, and there was a long silence.

Mr. Harding was moving miserably away when Dr. Rice came hurrying downstairs. The listener heard Faith rise to meet him.

"I've got to go away for a few minutes, Miss Faith. He is quiet now. Everything has gone well so far. If he pulls through till morning he'll have a fighting chance. Get some sleep if you can, poor little girl; he will need you more later."

Mr. Harding stepped forward into the light to speak to the doctor. But the latter gazed at him coldly and unrecognizingly, raised his hat and passed on without speaking. Mr. Harding stood with lips still parted as if for speech, gazing at the receding figure. At length he comprehended the meaning of the cold stare and knew that he had lost another friend.

Brooke Street was very quiet, but when he came out into Main Street and Borden Square he found that all Underhill valley seemed to be abroad. The street was alive with rough figures, moving restlessly up and down. The lamps flashed in pools left from the showers of the afternoon. The air came up fresh and damp, mist-laden from the river. It bore also an unusual excitement, and Mr. Harding felt with keen self-consciousness that he was its centre. The stern, heavy faces stared at him almost malignly, he thought. He bowed once or twice but received no response to his impersonal salutations. So he dropped his eyes and moved nervously toward

the bridge. He did not fear personal violence, but instead the words that hurt more than blows, — the open accusation of what he knew all were thinking. Sharp physical pain would have been a relief to the dull ache of body and mind that was slowly numbing him. But the words that he dreaded! — He hastened his steps.

Suddenly someone jostled him sharply. He was tired and spent with his illness of the morning, and the stress of emotion. He staggered and put out his hand uncertainly. It touched a bony shoulder.

"Take your hand off me, Albion Harding!" a sharp voice cried. "Poor as I be I'm above bein' touched by the like of you."

The words sounded far in the damp, evening air, as the speaker meant they should, out over the heads of the strolling people. Suddenly a hiss cut the air sharply. One by one added to its volume.

The crowd closed up angrily on Mr. Harding, who, white and defiant, stood with lifted head, gazing into the lowering faces around him. There was danger in the air, the danger which is interpreted by utter, bodeful silence.

But just then the crowd parted and Francis Reid stood by Mr. Harding's side. He grasped the elder man by the arm.

"Will you have the goodness to make way for us to pass?" he said coldly.

The crowd gave way a little; its mind was not firmly set on any violence. A few minutes more might have seen it convinced that its place was to forestall the courts; but Reid had appeared just in time.

"This is very absurd," Reid went on contemptuously. "I think there is no one here who knows Theodore Harding who thinks that rudeness to his father would please him. Will you please make way for us?"

The mob, holding all the undeveloped germs of trouble, gave way to his cold courtesy and let the two men pass through.

Mr. Harding leaned heavily on his companion's arm as they walked up the street. "I'm not feeling at all well tonight," he said apologetically. "The strain of the day and last night has been rather too much for me."

Reid was silent. Old feelings of loyalty and affection were struggling with scorn. The knowledge which had come to him through the words overheard the night before had sickened him of Mr. Harding's good qualities even more than of his bad ones. He did not know how this man's sensitive nature, eager for praise and applause, used all his life to esteem, was shrinking from

the aversion which he saw on every face about him. Had he known he could not have helped pitying the baffled, defeated soul, which knew better than any other the depth of its own degradation. The man seemed to himself very desolate and abased and old.

"Do you mind walking up the hill with me, my boy?" said Mr. Harding, wistfully.

"Certainly not," Reid answered, and they crossed the bridge and climbed the hill in silence.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Even in his weariness Mr. Harding could not sleep, dozing only to wake at once, startled and unrefreshed. But he passed through his outer office next morning every inch of him soldierly. The need for action had strengthened him. He could even meet Burnham with a calm face.

The latter sat at the desk of the private office, scrawling at random on the blotter. An unlighted cigar was between his teeth, his face was grey and heavily lined, his pale eyes had a furtive, frightened look which belied the firmness of his jaw.

"How's the boy?" Burnham questioned in a tone which showed how much he dreaded the reply.

"Alive, and with a chance," Mr. Harding answered briefly. His lips were dry and he swallowed with difficulty. A hot, unreasoning anger filled his veins.

"Lord! what a turn it gave me!" Burnham said with the tone of one who contemplates a danger past. As he spoke he lit his cigar.

"There's no particular cause for self-congratulation yet," Mr. Harding sneered. "If he lives at all he can hardly escape being a cripple."

"I'm devilish sorry for my part in it, Harding," Burnham said awkwardly, "and I'm sorry for the boy. I always liked him, even when I was maddest with him."

Albion Harding was silent. Each word goaded him almost beyond endurance. He knew suddenly the mood which makes murder possible. He could have slain the man, who, by his mismanagement, had killed his only son and branded him a murderer.

"You have bungled infernally," he said in the repressed tones of his anger. "It was a most fiendishly conceived plan to make that half-crazed Jew not only your tool but to make him do it on his own responsibility. Imprisonment for life would be a light punishment for such a crime."

"But it can't be fixed on me, you see," said Burnham, flushing an unwholesome purple in his anger. "If everything was known what would it amount to — that in a discussion I suggested an application of some of the man's theories, sim-

ply by way of illustration; that he brooded over it and finally did this thing. You can't throw responsibility back like that. If you do, go one step farther and where are you? It will be pretty talk for Underhill, and for missionary meetings, that Brother Harding killed his son to get his competition out of the way of the American. There's as much proof against you as against me."

"I beg your pardon, you err. I have your own confession that you have played upon this poor man's superstitions and dreams to make him do this thing." Mr. Harding could never name the deed.

"And there's my word that you told me to take any measures I saw fit in dealing with your son."

"Which statement I shall absolutely deny," said Mr. Harding coolly. "I restricted your action very definitely and you chose to disregard my restrictions."

"You can deny anything you want to. You talk as if you had only to say a thing for everybody to believe it. I don't know as there would be so much to choose as you think between your word and mine. The public in general thinks full as much of a man who admits he's bad, as it does of one who's always swelling around in

prayer-meeting, and all that sort of thing. I tell you, your missionary business and all that sort of thing don't count near as much as you think. It don't pull the wool over anybody's eyes. And as for the money you give,— there's been a d—n sight too much dirty money scattered round the country, in the last ten years, for that to make much impression on folks' minds."

Roger Burnham's face was deeply red, the big veins in his neck were swollen, his small eyes glared. He was angry through and through, but he was enjoying himself. He had said his say, and he made no attempt at resistance when Mr. Harding touched a bell and said coldly to the clerk who presented himself,

"Mr. Phillips, will you kindly show Mr. Burnham to the door."

Burnham turned in the outer office and said deliberately,

"You better think twice, Harding. You'll find it hard to get along without someone to do your dirty work for you." Then he stumped through the long room, at the heels of the smiling clerk.

Mr. Harding rose to his feet as soon as his guest had left. He had something to do. It was not the thing which impulse prompted. He would gladly have called aloud to the whole

world — "I have sinned, as few other men before me have done. Do with me as you will. I have sinned, but God knows I have suffered. Pity me!" If he could explain all his long struggle against the hateful pressure of necessity, it seemed to him that some hand must be extended to him in sympathy. But all the instincts of a life of self-control were against any such step. It had become a habit with him to face fate unswervingly. So instead of anything more sensational he left his office determined to persuade Reid to aid him.

He did not know even when he faced Reid before the editorial desk on what grounds he meant to ask the favor. The young man's face did not look inviting; his straight brows were drawn together in a frown and he seemed troubled. But his companion was in no mood to study faces carefully. He had no heart for his usual diplomacy. The nervous eagerness for action which possessed him brooked no delay.

"Mr. Reid, I have come to ask you what stand the 'Criterion' intends to take in the late unfortunate occurrence. It may be that this is a strange question for me to ask, but I am in a desperately hard place. There is no use in trying to blink the fact that people seem to think I had something to gain by the accident to my son — and that

therefore I must have had a hand in it. I hardly see why they are so ready to believe the worst of me."

Reid felt little pity for Mr. Harding's evident suffering. He answered coldly,

"The public accuses you of many things, Mr. Harding, for which you are not directly responsible. That makes it all the easier for it to suspect you of this. You must admit that appearances are against you."

"How could I have helped that? One man cannot attend to all the details of a business like this."

"The head of a business is responsible for the general spirit which pervades it. That is where the responsibility lies," Reid answered firmly.

Mr. Harding's pale face grew paler. The bright light of the June morning showed many weary lines and the cringing of fear in the dark eyes.

"But this is beside the matter," he continued hastily. "Can you answer the question which I asked at the outset of our conversation? You cannot guess what a comfort the backing of the 'Criterion' would be to me. The 'Criterion' has grown to have a great influence in the state. Public opinion will take its cue largely from it."

"I have not decided what I shall do," Reid said slowly.

"Mr. Barker — ?" Mr. Harding suggested.

"I have entire control while Mr. Barker is away. I don't even know where he is."

"Then if I should swear to you that I had nothing to do with the matter, that the American did not, with any knowledge of mine! I knew no more of it than you did."

Reid pondered on the force of the past tense of the verb, *knew,* in silence.

"Now if you believe that I was not connected in any way with this awful deed won't you say so?" Mr. Harding continued persuasively.

Reid was unmoved. "I will gladly publish any statement with your name attached. More than that I cannot promise."

"But, Mr. Reid, don't you see that it would be utterly useless for me to do that? While if you should say the same thing — people know you have been connected with the American and must know a great deal of the way it is managed. If you could say that such a thing was not consistent with the management of the American, nor with my character — I think I cannot tell you what it would mean to me." The eager voice faltered.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Harding, but I cannot under-

take your defence. What I have seen of the American doesn't altogether reassure me as to its part in this matter. I want to say again that I do not disbelieve your statement that you had no direct part in it; but I know only too well the spirit that has sometimes actuated the conduct of your corporation."

Reid paused abruptly. The interview was intensely painful to him. He felt the older man's shame with a personal shrinking. There was a long silence while Mr. Harding sat biting his white lips and gazing out into the sunshine.

"I have not been unmindful of past or present favors, Mr. Harding," Reid continued. "I have kept silent too long because I respected you so much. But I cannot do so any longer. I feel like a criminal. My championship could have made no difference, but I wish I could look back and remember that I had stood by Teddy." Reid's clear voice broke. "But I am not going to hesitate any longer. I shall come out tomorrow against the American. I don't know yet what I shall say; I shall try to avoid personalities as far as possible, you may be sure of that, and of course I shall always remember that anything which I may have learned while I was in your office is not at my disposal."

Reid finished firmly. It was always a relief

when he at length reached a decision. Moreover, he now felt absolutely sure of his own wisdom. The theory of the combine remained unchanged — but this one of the number had sinned shamefully. If he could find proof of its connection with this last enormity Reid meant to do so.

Mr. Harding gazed at the younger man coldly. A fire in his eyes had dried up the tears. He had one last card to play. He had been reluctant to use it; he realized that if driven to this thing he should have parted with another portion of his self-respect. But if his terms should be accepted the case would be less humiliating, somehow, than if they were refused. The possibility had been continually before him and he had preferred to humiliate himself to beg a favor rather than to grasp this last resort; but at length he spoke.

"I suppose you recognize the fact that I have some claim upon your consideration?"

"Have I not said that already? I realize that I am under obligations to you, Mr. Harding, that a discharge of my pecuniary debt will never release. As for the money you were so good as to lend me, I told you when you offered the loan that it would take me some time to discharge it." A sudden and horrible thought flashed over him. Mr. Harding might have a writ of attach-

ment served and suspend the publication of the paper. Barker was in the wilds of Canada, out of reach of mail or telegraph. Reid lifted his head proudly.

"We need not talk of your indebtedness, Mr. Reid," said Albion Harding suavely. His tone was benevolent, but the uncompromising light from the big window showed that his eyes had narrowed and grown crafty. "No, your little indebtedness is a slight matter. In fact I shall be glad to give you a receipt for it at any time you wish. You have it in your power to benefit me far more than that paltry sum can ever repay."

Reid looked at his companion in amazement. At first he did not comprehend the meaning of the words he had just heard. Then suddenly he understood. He rose with his thin lips drawn back over his perfect teeth.

"We need not discuss this matter further, Mr. Harding. We can hardly come to an agreement," he said coldly. He walked toward the door and Mr. Harding, propelled by an unknown force, followed him as meekly as repulsed suitor had ever left his office in times past. At the door Reid said,

"Perhaps it is as well that you should know that I overheard something which Roger Burn-

ham said to you on the night of the accident." He repeated the words coldly and accurately. "Good-day."

Reid went back to his desk seething with anger. The bribe seemed to him then entirely a personal insult; not, as it was, the last resort of desperation. But even in the midst of his tumult of feeling he decided that if possible he must secure the money to pay his debt to Mr. Harding; so he went out into the June air shimmering with heat and full of the scent of roses.

It seemed to give Doctor Rice a keen pleasure to help Reid against Mr. Harding. He had changed from friend to foe with the thoroughness which characterized everything he did.

"Never you fear, young man," he said vigorously when he had listened to Reid's story. "I'll see that the money is in your hands by night. I haven't that much where I can get at it on the spur of the moment, but I can get it for you. I'm only too glad — the scoundrel!"

In the street in front of Mrs. Ordway's house, Reid met Max Rubinovitch.

"How is he?" the latter said breathlessly, without waiting for any salutation.

"No change, I guess," Reid answered gloomily. "Not much hope!"

"I didn't think he was in the mill. How did

he happen to be? He went away," said Rubinovitch, wildly.

"He missed the train, I think; but where he was, or what he was doing all that time, God knows."

"I thought he was away," Rubinovitch reiterated. "He was about the only friend I had in the world."

Reid turned languidly, not greatly interested in Rubinovitch's regrets. The narcotic influence of the noon was in his veins. For forty-eight hours he had hardly slept. Pictures, floating continuously before his eyes, had kept him awake. One vision after another had drifted past him: a girl's white accusing face; an anxious glossy dog, a man's narrowed, cringing eyes, a crowd with white faces in the light of flames, men laboring with parted lips and distorted faces over heaps of ruins. But while the others passed one returned again and again — a face ghastly white, with matted hair, bluish lips drawn away from clenched teeth, and crimson flecks on the brown beard. Now weariness prevailed and he sought his room and fell asleep.

How long his slumber lasted he did not know. Suddenly he awakened with a start. One thought stood forth clearly — Rubinovitch did it! The mind had worked while the body slept, and had

solved the vexing problem. He saw in a flash how reasonable the matter was. Rubinovitch's own words, "I didn't think he was in the mill. He went away," had been spoken in the tone of one trying to justify himself. He remembered the incoherent argument of a contribution which the Jew had submitted to the "Criterion" not long before — an argument which censured the opponents of the trust for standing in the way of progress. He remembered Burnham's assertion of the night before, and the fact that he had seen the two together several times that spring. More convincing than all was the regret of Rubinovitch's whole appearance.

Reid thought the matter was plain and clear; but as he considered it longer he saw that he had no proof; at best he had established a probability. But although he had nothing definite to offer he had his own certainty. Burning words filled his mind, sentences formed which must be written. His pen was winged and barbed. Out of the white heat of his anger and grief, he wrote that biting arraignment of the methods of the trust, called "An Accusation," which was copied throughout the country, in weeks that followed, and made his name.

CHAPTER XXIX

The sun was just rising. Bird-songs rippled and tinkled from the maples. Great gushes of soft air lifted the muslin curtains of the chamber and let them fall again. Up from the garden came the scent of dew-drenched roses, almost drowning the odor of drugs in the sick room.

Faith Ordway was watching by her lover's side while the nurse slept. She had been sitting on the edge of the bed with her hand in his when he had fallen asleep. Gradually the cramped position grew unbearable. Softly she sank to her knees, and just as the first low sunbeam fell on the drawn blind she closed her aching eyes.

She was not sleeping, however; every nerve was too tense. The bird-songs clashed painfully on her ears, the perfume of the roses made her faint. All the sweet things of nature seemed only a mockery of life's bitterness. This was her wedding morning, rising as such a happy

day should with sunshine. She thought, as she crouched there with her hand in that hot clasp, of the day as she had planned it, with its whiteness of wedding garments, its greeting friends. And then, the cheerful bustle over, the drive through the late June afternoon out to Clear Pond, and the golden sunset through the pine-stems. She knew that this could never be. She knew that every hour he clung to life increased Theodore's chances; she had seen that daily Dr. Rice's face lost a little of its anxiety. But she also knew, with keen intuition, that such a clinging to life might in the end be harder for Theodore's restless, active temperament than death.

The birds sang on more jubilantly without; the narrow strip of sunlight crept along the floor. Faith was thinking numbly of the blight which had come over both their lives, when a voice said huskily,

"Faith."

She lifted her head startled. Theodore had not known her before, though he had never failed to be quieted by her presence. Now there was recognition in the tired, heavy-lidded eyes.

"What is it, Theodore?" Faith asked gently.

"Wasn't it today?" he whispered, with long pauses between the words.

Faith hesitated a moment but something told her what he meant.

"Yes, dear," she said.

"I — thought — so," he replied with a glimmer of fun in his eyes. "A — fellow doesn't — usually forget — his wedding day."

Faith laid her cheek on his hand, already growing thin and white. She could not speak, she was struggling vainly, for the first time, for self-control. What all the horror and tragedy and the grief of others had failed to do, this touch of the old familiar lightness had done.

"Don't," said the man as he felt her form shaken with sobs.

There was a long silence. Faith stroked his hand softly as she slowly regained her self-control.

"Could we — be — married — just — the same?" the halting voice went on. "It — won't make — much — difference — to you," there was a long pause, "and — it will — to me."

Faith knew what he meant. She foresaw that he would be less willing to tie her to him if he thought the future of his invalidism would be long. So she did not enlighten him just then. She simply said,

"I would be glad, dear, if Dr. Rice thinks you are strong enough. I will speak to him about

it. Don't say another word," and she stooped and kissed him.

"Frank — will see — to everything," he gasped more faintly.

"Yes, yes, now be quiet."

When the nurse relieved her, Faith stole out to her hammock on the veranda. She wished to think quietly, and she wanted to intercept Dr. Rice and warn him of Theodore's desire.

After the doctor had gone upstairs on his early morning visit, Faith sat there with the leafy shadows weaving over her weary face and bright hair. She was trying to justify herself. She felt that Theodore was acting in ignorance of the possibility, hourly growing stronger. She felt that she was deceiving him from her standpoint of broader knowledge. But she knew that for a long time, if he recovered, he would need close and devoted care, and she feared that he would not let her bind herself to his wrecked life if he knew all. She knew that he needed the care which she could give him only as his wife, and she knew, moreover, that she was satisfying her own desire.

"Yes," said Dr. Rice as he came out upon the veranda again. "He is certainly stronger. You must do it all just as quietly as possible. Be matter-of-fact, and don't let there be any excitement.

And don't say anything more about it until the time comes."

"And you think it is the right thing to do?" Faith queried. The two had been firm friends ever since Mr. Ordway's sickness and death. "You see he doesn't understand. He thinks he isn't going to live. It seems as if I were taking an advantage of him in some way."

"He may not live, remember that. Don't hope for too much. But you know best about the other. You know what you are undertaking — may be undertaking."

"And do you suppose I care for that — am afraid of that?" the girl flashed out.

"No, I didn't, to tell the truth. I know you too well by this time." Dr. Rice laid his hand gently on the girl's arm. "I'm not sure that I don't think Harding is to be envied, no matter what comes. Run in and get your breakfast, child."

When Faith entered the dining room she saw Mrs. Harding and her mother seated there. Mrs. Harding, daintily gowned as usual, but worn and anxious, had just driven down from the hill for the first news of the morning. Faith languidly took the breakfast which her mother served, and tried to think of some way in which to tell the two women. At last she said simply,

"Theodore wants to be married today just as we had planned."

"My dear, you would never dare," Mrs. Harding interposed quickly. "It might prove fatal." Matters stood much as before between Faith and Mrs. Harding. The latter had grown to admire and respect the courageous and self-contained girl; but as she saw the younger woman given privileges and responsibilities in the sick room which were denied her, a fierce jealousy sprang up. She felt bitterly that, with Faith once Theodore's wife, there would indeed be no place for her. She had hoped that this accident might defer the marriage. So she was still unconvinced when Faith said wearily,

"Dr. Rice says it's not too dangerous an experiment. I have talked with him. He says that it must be done very quietly and with no excitement."

"But there will necessarily be excitement," Mrs. Harding persisted earnestly. "I'm sure Mr. Harding would not think it wise."

Faith's face burned with a sudden, angry rush of color and she opened her lips hastily. She opened her lips, but she closed them again without speech. Mrs. Harding continued quietly.

"I can realize, my dear, that aside from every thing else, the mere postponement of your wed-

ding day is painful to you. But you wouldn't wish to endanger Theodore's life."

"Of course not; but don't you see, Mrs. Harding, it is better not to deny him if he wishes it? Dr. Rice says so."

Faith was breaking her egg automatically. Her whole body ached from fatigue and lack of sleep. Her tired nerves cried out fiercely against what the soft voice was saying, but her brain refused to furnish her with reasons. She hardly knew what she said. She noticed that her mother was watching her anxiously, and even that loving gaze irritated her. She wished to be alone in the quiet of the screened sick room.

"I don't wish to seem intrusive, my dear," Mrs. Harding replied. "But you must remember that he is my son, that his welfare is as dear to me as it is to you. Let me consult Mr. Harding. I'm sure he would advise —"

The last allusion was too much for Faith's self-restraint. She could stand it no longer, and leaving her breakfast almost untasted she turned and left the room.

There was a moment's astonished silence. Mrs. Harding saw in this nothing more than an unexpected touch of anger at being thwarted. She bit her lip and looked at Mrs. Ordway reproachfully. The latter was all on fire for her daugh-

ter and spoke sharply, forgetting the deference which she habitually paid to Mrs. Harding's grace and elegance.

"There, she's gone off and ain't ate hardly a mite of breakfast, an' she needs everything she can take to keep her up."

Mrs. Harding opened her blue eyes in astonishment at Mrs. Ordway. She had never liked the blunt, plain woman. She had never seen the worth beneath the garrulous, ungrammatical speech. In Mrs. Ordway lay one of Evelyn Harding's strongest objections to Faith. Now she spoke, courteously, to be sure, but a little indifferently.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry if I said anything to offend her. I didn't know she took offence so easily."

"I do' know's she's any quicker to take offence than the average. I should think you could see she's all wore out. She ain't slep' more'n an hour at a stretch, I guess, for a week, an' ain't eaten anything but what she's forced down; an' then havin' you bring him up that way —"

Mrs. Harding was genuinely astonished. She had received no hint of popular speculation in regard to the accident. Her suspicions of the spring, though hardly laid at rest by Mr. Harding's assertions, had lain dormant. They could

never have mounted to include such a crime as this. Mr. Harding's anxiety and grief had been perfectly explicable on other grounds. She had no inkling of Mrs. Ordway's meaning, but something in the tone of the remark startled her.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

In a calmer moment Mrs. Ordway would not have inflicted this wound. But the slight to her child, the imputation of ill-temper at this time, of all others, touched the mother to the quick. Moreover, she loved Theodore, and her heart was as yet unhealed for her own grief. The same agency had wrought cruel harm in both cases. To her practical mind Albion Harding, the nominal head of the American, became directly responsible for the death of her husband and the accident to the man who would have been her son. She believed him nothing better than a murderer, and her heart was full of anger against him. So she answered:

"I sh'd think y'd know what I mean. I mean that he's been mixed up in this matter too much already. That's what everybody's saying."

"What is everybody saying?" Mrs. Harding demanded, the faint flush fading from her face. She did not yet grasp Mrs. Ordway's meaning. The woman's manner, however, and the hint of

some aspersion against her husband, frightened her.

Mrs. Ordway hesitated. It was no easy thing to tell a woman that her husband was reputed the murderer of his son. Even her anger and grief paused at it for a moment; but Mrs. Harding gave her no chance for hesitation.

"What are they saying?" she repeated. Her voice did not grow louder, but its soft notes grew hard. "You shall tell me! You must, now you have said so much." Her manner compelled Mrs. Ordway.

"They're sayin' that if it hadn't been for the American, Theodore Harding wouldn't be a layin' there," she said fiercely. The mere phrasing of her hitherto unspoken thought increased her anger. She went on with the rest of her accusation with a rush.

"An' they say, an' I know, that if it hadn't been for Albion Harding and the American, my husband would 'a' been livin' yet. Not but I am better off than you are, this minute, for I can look back an' think that he never knowin'ly wronged a man in his life,—an' now you can see why Faithy wouldn't be likely to ask Mr. Harding about anything."

"Does she believe that?" Mrs. Harding asked

faintly. She sat white and still, shocked into numbness by the awful accusation.

"She hasn't said so," said Mrs. Ordway slowly. "But I guess she does. Why shouldn't she? Who else has got anything to gain by it? How did it happen, anyway? It was blowed up, plain enough."

Mrs. Harding had no specific defence of her husband to offer. She had not thought the matter out for herself, nor tried to find definite reasons for the accident. She had a dim theory that machinery, and boilers, and all the equipment of a factory were dangerous and subject to explosion or other fatal misadventure. She had not considered the necessity of accounting for the accident by any outside agency. Now she could only reiterate haughtily, with an emphasis which covered her inward distress —.

"It is perfectly absurd. I supposed Mr. Harding was better known in Underhill."

Something in the cold contempt of her tone quenched Mrs. Ordway's kindling pity, and moved her to further speech.

"Underhill is gittin' to know Mr. Harding; there ain't a mite of doubt about it. An' the more it comes to know, the readier it gits to believe things. Mind you, I don't say he done it himself; but he knows who done it, an' he ain't

any object in followin' of it up. You can ask him an' see. I used to be pretty sharp with father sometimes because he didn't take much stock in Mr. Harding. I wish't I had back some of the things I've said to him about it. I used to think because he spoke a good deal in prayer-meetin' an' give to missions he was better than father. But I know now which was the good man. Father said you couldn't tell what a man would do when he got so much power in his hands, an' I guess you can't. 'Tany rate, Mr. Harding's surprised us all. But, there, what's the use talkin'? You won't believe the things I'm a sayin' of, an' 'taint fittin' you should. I'm most sorry I said anythin' about it," she added, relenting as she saw Mrs. Harding's ashen face. "It don't do no good to say hard things —." Her voice trailed off into silence as she went to find Faith, and coax her back to her unfinished breakfast.

Mrs. Harding rose and left the room. The carriage was waiting without and she drove to her husband's office. She crossed the outer room swiftly, trailing her lavender muslin heedlessly over the floor, and entered the private office without knocking.

Albion Harding turned at her entrance. Nat-

urally enough he misinterpreted her frightened face.

"Theodore?" and he rose to his feet with a peculiar whiteness about his mouth. His whole face was full of fear. Mrs. Harding eyed him keenly. It might be the fear that any father feels for his son's welfare.

"No! No!" she said. "Theodore is stronger this morning. Really better, they think."

"What is it, then?"

"Tell me, Albion, how did it happen?"

"The accident? — I have heard many theories advanced but none of them seem really satisfactory." He was temporizing, but he knew that she had heard what all Underhill was saying.

"They say you did it?" the words were out. Mrs. Harding paused, shocked, now the suspicion was actually spoken. She feared her husband's outburst of anger; but he did not retort. Instead, that look came into his face — the look which she had seen before Theodore's accusation.

"Then you have heard that?" he said slowly.

"Tell me, Albion, you did not do it?"

"I did not do it, Evelyn," he said solemnly. He meant to brave it out for her sake, although he was weary of pretences for his own. He had

no doubt that she would believe him implicitly, and that it would save her much pain. Then came a sudden revulsion of feeling. There had never been anything but truth between them. He could not bear to see her face lighten at his falsehood. There had been a time when he could have firmly deceived her for her own sake; but now he had not the heart. His one desire was for confession. He caught his breath.

"I did not do it," he reiterated. "But I would to God, Evelyn, that I did not feel a weight of responsibility for it. Wait, and I will tell you everything, and you shall judge. I did not mean any harm to the boy. Nobody meant any harm to him. But we were desperate. If matters had gone against us in Congress, Theodore's power with the opposition would have meant our ruin — and that meant so much. So many interests! so many people with only a little money to lose their all, and it meant the failure of a principle. Oh, I can't make you understand it, Evelyn — but it was a matter of life and death. And so I — told Mr. Burnham if he could by any honorable means put a stop — to Theodore's activity,— to do it. It hurt me, even that! And this! This is what he did. I can't tell you how — he is not legally responsible for anything — but he has spoiled our boy's life! Don't you be-

lieve what I have said? Before God, Evelyn, that is all the part I had in it!"

"All the part!" she said slowly, with stiff lips. Then she turned and left the room.

In the long, anxious days that followed, she sat at his table, and cared for his welfare. But she never gave him a sight into her feelings toward him. Whether she believed in his statement or in the worst that the press said of him, he did not know; and he began to wonder if he had ever really understood her.

CHAPTER XXX.

Albion Harding drove up the hill one crisp morning in October, glad to reach home once more from New York. His eagerness was chilled when he found his wife absent, and could get no news of her whereabouts from the servants. She had departed as soon as breakfast was over without leaving any word. He could guess, however, where she was. The echoing house, spacious but barren of love, seemed to him symbolic of the emptiness of his life. He drove back to his office, glad to bury himself in his heaped-up correspondence.

At last he leaned back in his revolving chair with a sigh of relief. But one letter remained, and that bore the seal of the missionary body of which he was treasurer. He knew what this was likely to contain, and his lips curved in a satisfied smile as he opened it leisurely. A slip of pinkish paper fluttered to the floor unheeded as he read:

"DEAR BROTHER HARDING:— It becomes my painful duty to inform you that there is a growing feeling among the Trustees of our organization that your resignation would be for the interest of the body. They appreciate to a man the almost invaluable nature of the services you have rendered, and the difficulty they will have in securing, even for money, the care and attention you have so generously given for love. They realize the fatuity of expecting to duplicate your business ability and experience. Nevertheless, the unfortunate rumors which have been recently circulated, and the criticism which has during the last three months assailed you, have brought them to the reluctant conclusion that the name of the society should be severed from your own. Personally, let me assure you of my entire sympathy with you, and of my belief that you will be enabled successfully to refute the charges.

"I am also instructed to say that the Trustees have decided most regretfully that, under the existing circumstances, they must return the check for five thousand dollars which you so generously contributed on the 6th inst. to the running expenses of the body.

"Most fraternally yours,

"ABRAM K. FLYNT,

"Secretary."

Mr. Harding rose suddenly to his feet, and paced up and down the floor. Of all the blows which public opinion had dealt him, this was the hardest. The missionary organization had been his child; he had nourished it out of his abundance, and now, like his children by blood, it had turned against him. He knew how deep must be the feeling of those godly men, its Trustees, to make them refuse his money and his aid, and hopelessly alienate him. The pang became sharper as he realized that they were virtually denying him his reparation. He had said to himself that the wrongs the American had done should be made good, and now! The newspapers, a very scourge to this sensitive man, would have a choice bit of news.

He sank into his chair wearily, too much shocked and grieved for thought, and gazed out across the square. As he looked idly, with his heart full of bitterness, a carriage drew up at the station and two people alighted, his wife, and a man, young apparently, but painfully weak. He had not seen his son since the accident and was shocked at the change in the alert figure. He saw Faith and Reid come walking briskly down the street and join the others with the dog circling about them. He saw a chair brought out into the warm autumn sunlight, where Theodore seat-

ed himself languidly, while the bustle of departure went on.

The noon whistle of the mills sounded and gradually a little crowd gathered about the chair. Theodore's men and his old companions in his father's mills had assembled to say good-by — a last farewell, many of them thought it. The group was a sad one. More than one woman wiped her eyes as she walked slowly away. But the centre of it fought the prevailing grief bravely. Mr. Harding saw the thin face thrown back more than once in laughter, in the familiar fashion.

The twelve-twenty express for the south drew in and the business of departure went rapidly on. The glossy dog was taken to a rear car. The invalid was helped aboard the train. Mr. Harding watched breathlessly. Deep in his heart he had feared that when Theodore went south Mrs. Harding would go with him. He knew that without his wife his life would be utterly empty, but he had not spoken. And now the worst seemed coming true. He held his breath as the slender black-clad figure entered the car. She might merely have gone aboard to see Theodore comfortably located; but the bell rang and the long train moved slowly out.

Albion Harding laid his grey head on his arms.

How long he remained there he did not know. It was an hour far more bitter than that of death could be. He looked back over his past life and said to himself that it was all false, all a failure. What did it count that he had succeeded? What did it count that almost unlimited power was his? The American was surely established. With a deep indrawn breath he began to count the cost, bitterly and without disguises. Theodore, bidding farewell, perhaps forever, to his birthplace, beaten, broken, disheartened; Ordway resting in his bankrupt's grave; Oakley stooping rapidly from the high standard which he had set himself, tarnished in popular opinion by crooked dealing, growing reckless and cynical; these things, he told himself bluntly, were his doing. He had brought upon Ordway and Theodore their disaster, he had spurred Oakley to the work that had been his undoing.

Then his thoughts went out to the deeds of the American all over the country, and he told himself that these also were his. Smokeless chimneys, discouraged workmen, disheartened employers, complaining farmers. More than once he had testified before courts, with his hand on the Bible and the glow of truth in his heart, that

he knew nothing of this or that; but sometimes, in the many-voiced silence of the night, or in a moment like this, he saw himself more truly.

For what of himself? He, who had counted the ruin of others, could not measure his own. What was he? He did not know. He knew only that he was reckoned implacable, unyielding, bound to succeed at any cost, without feeling for his family, his workmen,— a thief and a murderer. He was denied even the privilege of spending himself for others — a dry sob rose in his throat at the thought. In spite of his success he was a failure, he was old and ill, and alone. He had succeeded, but he, and not he alone, had paid the price.

Suddenly the door opened softly, there was a step on the floor and Evelyn Harding sank down by her husband's side.

"Albion, what is it?" she said in startled tones. "Are you ill? Tell me."

"No, I'm not ill," he said mechanically.

"What is it, then?"

"I thought you had gone with Theodore," he said automatically. "You got on board the train and I saw it move off."

"Yes, it started while I was still on board, but they stopped for me. I couldn't go. I tried

hard to make up my mind to it," she added rapidly.

"I knew you were thinking of it. You would better have gone, Evelyn. I'm not fit for you to touch," he added melodramatically, as she laid her head against his arm.

"Albion, don't!"

"It is true,— do you know what I am?"

She only shrank closer to him. She did not protest as he had hoped.

"It doesn't make any difference what you are. We have lived as husband and wife for thirty years. I can't leave you now any more than I can leave myself, and I couldn't bear it away from you, thinking of you all alone here and ill. He didn't need me; he has Faith, but you have only me."

"God is too good to me," he said softly, putting his arms about her. "I have not deserved that it should be as it was before between us."

"Don't," she said, and she shrank a little from him. "How can it be as it was before, when I'm thinking of him every moment of the day — my poor little boy!"

The train for the south was speeding over levels gleaming crimson beneath the setting sun. The red light streamed into the car-window and

lent a little color to Theodore's face, very haggard and weary against its cushions.

"I'm a poor stick," he said smiling ruefully. "I'm more tired than if I had been tramping all day. Do you know, Faith, I've been wondering if I should ever go partridge shooting again."

"I don't see why not," Faith answered bravely, and her lips looked as if she unaided might wrest the boon from fate. "You are gaining all the time, Teddy."

"That's right. They didn't think I'd ever turn out as well as this, did they? Say, Faith," he added after a moment's pause, his voice falling as he spoke, "did you see father?"

"No, where?" said Faith quickly.

"Up at his office window. He was looking down at us. He looked sick. I say, Faith, it's hard lines on him."

"What?" said Faith curtly. Her tone was not compassionate.

"Oh, everything," Theodore answered vaguely. "Do you know, I'd give a good deal to know how it happened."

"Frank knows," Faith said quickly. "He won't tell, though. He says he can't prove anything."

"Well, I guess it's one of the things the less you know about the better," Theodore said wear-

ily. "There's just one thing about it," he added after a little pause, smiling in the old radiant fashion. "Most people would think I was pretty well done for, and I don't deny I am up against it. But after all, Faith, I've got you — and that's everything — and I haven't lost my grip."

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